



TALES RETOLD
FOR EASY READING



TALES
FROM
TOLSTOY

As. 12

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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FOR EASY READING

Second Series

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TALES RETOLD FOR EASY READING

Second Series

TALES FROM TOLSTOY

Retold by R. D. Binfield

from the translation

by Louise and Aylmer Maude

Illustrated by Doris Boulton



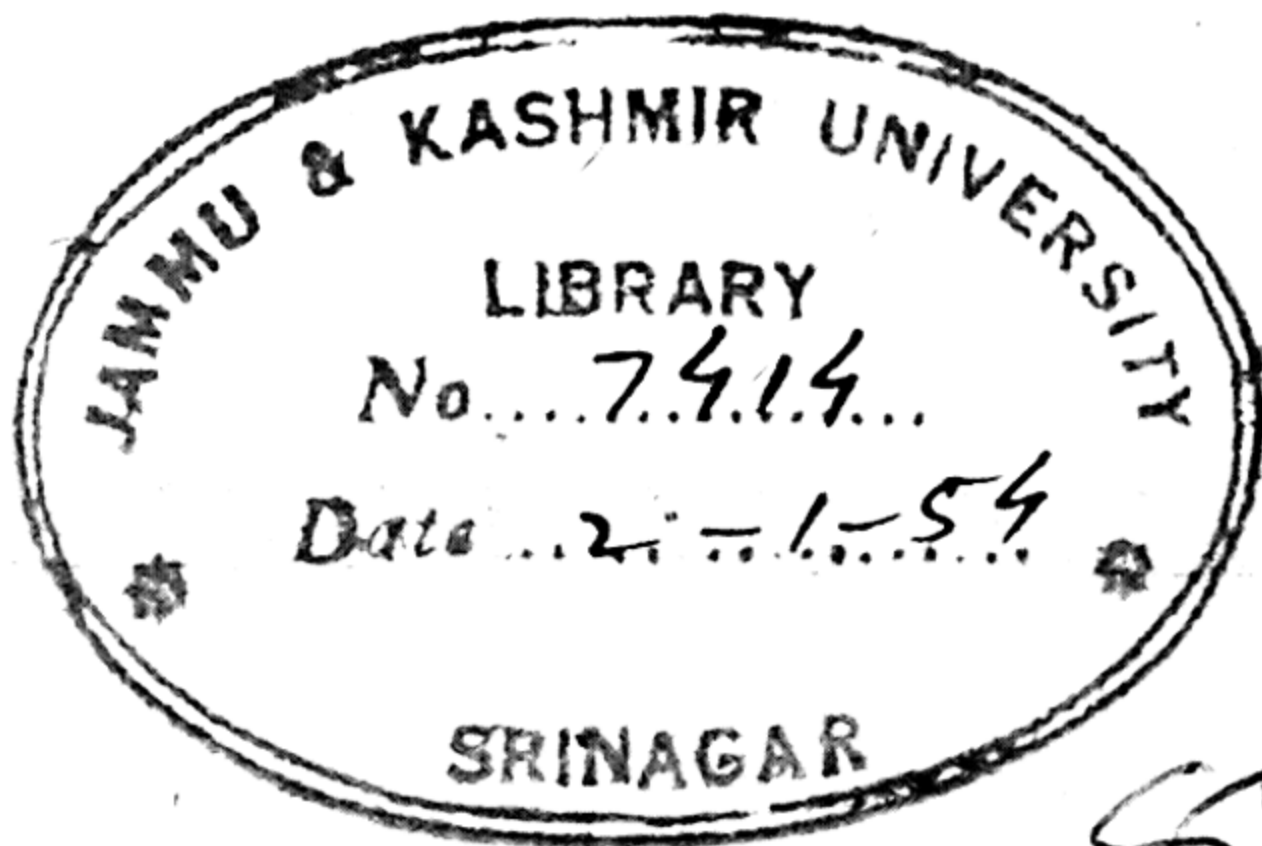
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Note

Count Leo Tolstoy lived from 1828 to 1910. He was a Russian nobleman who owned a great deal of land, but felt it was his duty as a Christian to give it away and live a simple life, teaching poor children to read, working hard in his own fields, and even making his own bread.

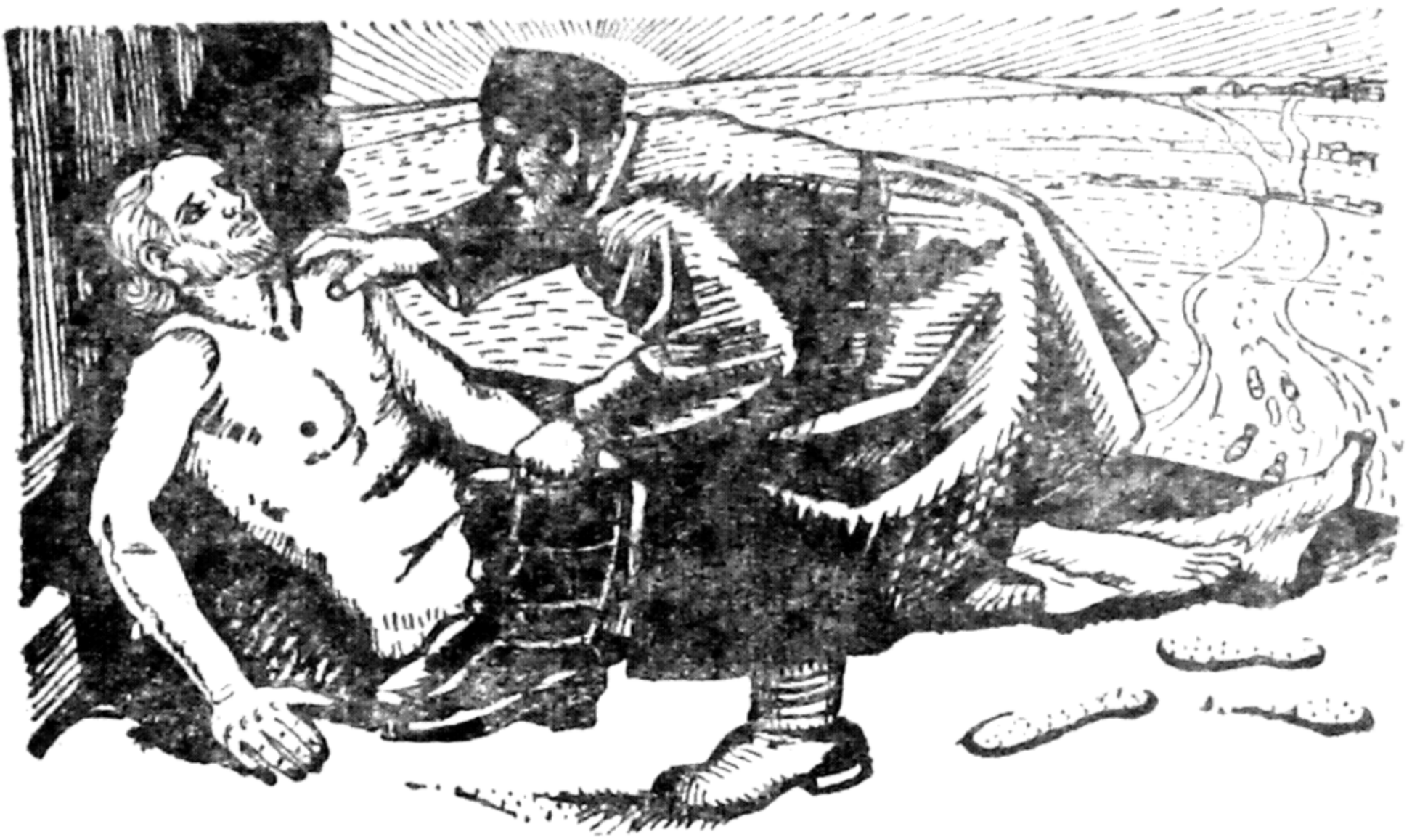
Tolstoy is most widely known for his long story *War and Peace*, which is frequently described as 'the greatest novel* ever written'. But even if Tolstoy had not written his novels and plays he would still have been a famous writer because of his short tales.

These tales give a very true picture of the life of the Russian peasant* from fifty to one hundred years ago. In each one we see that Tolstoy is not merely telling a story to amuse and interest us : he is teaching a lesson. Each of these lessons can be put into a few words. In every case their message for us all is important and everlasting.

*Words marked * are explained in the Glossary on pages 87-9.*

Contents

What Men Live By	<i>page</i> 1
Little Girls Wiser than Men	32
How Much Land does a Man Need?	35
The Imp and the Peasant's Bread	59
A Tiny Spark can Burn the House	65



What Men Live By

We know that we have passed out of death to life because we love our brothers. He who does not love, remains dead.—*I Epistle St. John iii. 14*

How can the love of God live in a rich man who sees his brother in need and does not help him? My little children, let us not love by words or with our tongue but in deed and truth.—*iii. 17-18*

Love is of God ; and everyone who loves is a child of God, and knows God. He who has no love does not know God ; for God is love.—*iv. 7-8*

No man has ever seen God ; if we love one another, God lives in us.—*iv. 12*

God is love, and he who lives in love, lives in God and God lives in him.—*iv. 16*

If a man says, ' I love God,' and hates his brother, he is not telling the truth ; for if he does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen ?—*iv. 20*

I

A shoemaker named Simon, who had neither house nor land of his own, lived with his wife and children in a peasant's house. He earned his bread by working. Work was cheap but bread was dear, and he spent most of the money he earned in buying food. The man and his wife had only one sheepskin coat for the two of them, and even that was old and full of holes, and for two years he had wanted to buy sheepskins for a new coat. Before winter Simon saved a little money. A three-rouble* note lay hidden in his wife's box, and five roubles and twenty kopeks* were owed to him by people whose shoes he had made.

So one morning he decided to go to the village to buy the sheepskins. He put his wife's warm undercoat over his shirt, and over that he put his own cloth coat. He took the three-rouble note in his pocket, cut a strong walking-stick to help him on his journey, and started off after breakfast.

'I will collect the five roubles that are owing to me,' he thought. 'If I add them to the three I have got, that will be enough to buy sheepskins for the winter coat.'

He came to the village and called at a peasant's house, but the man was not at home. The peasant's wife promised that her husband would pay the money next week, but she could not pay it herself. Then Simon went to the home of another peasant, but this one said that he had not enough money, and would pay only twenty kopeks which he owed for a pair

of boots Simon had mended. Simon then tried to buy the sheepskins on credit, but the dealer would not trust him.

‘Bring your money,’ he said, ‘and then you may have what skins you like. We know how difficult it is to collect debts.’

So all the business the shoemaker did was to get the twenty kopeks for boots he had mended, and to take a pair of boots which a peasant gave him to mend.

Simon felt sad. He spent the twenty kopeks on vodka,* and started back home without buying any skins. In the morning he had felt cold ; but after drinking the vodka, he felt warm even without a sheepskin coat. He walked along, striking his stick on the cold hard earth with one hand, carrying the boots with the other, and talking to himself.

‘I’m quite warm,’ he said, ‘although I have no sheepskin coat. I’ve had a drink, and it is warming the whole of my body. I need no sheepskins. I go along and I do not worry about anything. That is the kind of man I am ! What do I care ? I can live without sheepskins. I don’t need them. My wife will worry, that is certain. And she is right, it is a shame that I work all day and then people do not pay me. What should I say to them ? “Stop ! If you don’t pay what you owe me, I will take your skin off, certainly I will.” Would they pay then ? A man pays twenty kopeks at a time ! What can I do with twenty kopeks ? Drink it—that’s all I can do. He says he has no money. Perhaps this is true—but what about me ? “You have a house and cattle, and

everything", I say, "but I have only what I am now wearing. You have your own corn growing; I have to buy every grain. Whatever I do, I must spend three roubles every week for bread alone. I come home and find the bread all eaten up and I have to pay another rouble and a half. So you pay me what you owe, and don't make excuses!"

By this time he had nearly reached the shrine* at the bend in the road. He looked up and saw something white behind the shrine. It was almost dark, and, though the shoemaker looked hard at the thing, he was not able to decide what it was. 'There was no white stone here before. Can it be an ox? It is not like an ox. It has a head like a man, but it is too white, and what could a man be doing there?'

He came closer, so that he could see it clearly. He was surprised to see that it really was a man, alive or dead, sitting without any clothes on, and resting against the shrine without moving. The shoemaker was terribly frightened and he thought, 'Someone has killed him, robbed him of all his clothes, and left him here. If I touch him I shall surely get into trouble.'

So the shoemaker went on. He passed in front of the shrine so that he could not see the man. When he had gone some way past, he looked back and saw that the man was no longer resting against the shrine, but was moving and looking towards him. The shoemaker felt more frightened than before and thought, 'Shall I go back to him or shall I go on? If I go near him something terrible may happen.'

Who knows who the fellow is ? He has not come here to do any good. If I go near he may jump up and take me by the throat, and I shall not be able to get away. Or if not he would still be a worry to me. What could I do with a man with no clothes on ? I could not give him the only clothes I have. May heaven help me to get away !'

So the shoemaker hurried on and left the shrine behind him. But suddenly he stopped in the road.

'What are you doing, Simon ?' he said to himself. 'The man may be dying of hunger, and you slip past afraid. Have you become so rich that you are afraid of robbers ? Ah, Simon, you should be filled with shame !'

So he turned back towards the shrine.

2

Simon went up to the man, looked at him and saw that he was young and strong-looking, with no marks on his body, but very cold and frightened. He sat there without looking up at Simon, as if he had no strength to lift his eyes. Simon went close to him, and then the man seemed to wake up. He turned his head, opened his eyes and looked into Simon's face. That one look was enough to make Simon love the man. He threw on the ground the warm boots he was carrying, took off his belt and then his cloth coat.

'This is not a time for talking,' he said. 'Come, put this coat on at once !' And Simon took the man by

the arms and helped him to get up. As the stranger stood there, Simon saw that his body was clean and healthy-looking. His hands and feet were well-shaped and his face was good and kind. Simon threw his coat over the man's shoulders and helped him find the arm-holes. Then Simon pulled the coat closely round the man and tied the belt.

Simon even took off his own torn cap to put it on the man's head, but then his own head felt cold and he thought, 'He has long thick hair but I have none.' So he put the cap on his own head again. 'It will be better to give him something for his feet,' he thought ; and he made the man sit down and helped him to put on the warm boots, saying, 'There, friend, now move about and warm yourself. We can settle other matters later. Can you walk ?'

The man stood up and looked kindly at Simon, but did not say a word.

'Why do you not speak ?' said Simon. 'It is too cold to stay here. We must go home. Come, now, take my stick, and if you are feeling weak lean on that. Now step out !' The man started to walk and moved easily, wasting no time.

As they went on, Simon asked him, 'And where do you belong to ?'

'I do not come from this part of the country.'

'I thought you did not. I know the people about here. But how did you come to be there by the shrine ?'

'I cannot tell.'

'Has some one been ill-treating you ?'

‘ No one has ill-treated me. God has punished me.’

‘ Of course, God rules us all. Still, you must find food and a roof for your head somewhere. Where do you want to go to ? ’

‘ I do not mind where I go.’

Simon was greatly surprised. The man did not seem to be an evil fellow, and he spoke well, yet he did not say who he was or where he came from. But Simon thought, ‘ Who knows what may have happened ? ’ And he said to the stranger, ‘ Well, then, come home with me and warm yourself for a while.’

So Simon walked towards his home, and the other man kept at his side. The wind had become stronger, and Simon felt cold under his shirt. The warming effect of the vodka was leaving him, and he began to feel cold. He went along breathing loudly and pulling his wife’s coat tightly round him, and he thought to himself, ‘ Well ! I went out for sheepskins and I come home without even a coat to my back, and also I am bringing with me a man with no clothes on. Matrena will not be pleased ! ’ When he thought of his wife he felt uneasy,* but when he looked at the stranger he remembered how the poor fellow had looked up at him by the shrine, and his heart was glad.

Simon's wife had everything ready early that day. She had cut wood, brought water, fed the children, eaten her own meal, and now she sat thinking. She wondered whether she should make bread that day or the next. There was still a large piece left.

'If Simon has had some dinner in town,' she thought, 'and does not eat much supper, the bread will last for another day.'

She weighed the piece of bread in her hand again and again, and thought, 'I will not make any more to-day. We have very little flour left. If we are careful, we can just make this last till Friday.'

So Matrena put away the bread and sat down at the table to mend a hole in her husband's shirt. While she worked she thought about her husband buying skins for a winter coat.

'I hope the dealer does not cheat* him. My husband is much too simple. He cheats nobody, but any child can cheat him. Eight roubles is a lot of money—he ought to get some good sheepskins at that price—not the finest skins, but enough for a good winter coat. How difficult it was last winter to live without a warm coat! I could neither get down to the river nor go out anywhere. When he went out, he put on all we had, and there was nothing left for me. He did not start very early to-day, but it is time he returned. I hope he has not gone drinking* !'

Matrena had hardly thought this when she heard

footsteps at the door, and someone entered. She put down her sewing and went out into the passage. There she saw two men : Simon, and with him a man without a hat, wearing fine warm boots.

Matrena at once noticed a smell of vodka. 'So he has been drinking,' she thought. And when she saw that he had only her under-coat on, and had not bought a sheepskin coat, but stood there silent as if in shame, then her heart was ready to break. 'He has spent the money on drink,' she thought, 'and has been enjoying himself, with some good-for-nothing fellow whom he has brought home with him.'

Matrena let them pass into the house, followed them in, and saw that the new-comer was a young, small man, wearing her husband's coat. She could see no shirt under it, and he had no hat. When he had entered, he stood without moving or raising his eyes, and Matrena thought, 'He must be a bad man—he's afraid.'

Matrena looked angry, and stood by the stove* waiting to see what they would do.

Simon took off his cap and sat down by the table as if nothing were wrong.

'Come, Matrena ; if supper is ready, let us have some.'

Matrena said something to herself and did not move but stayed where she was, by the stove. She looked first at one and then at the other and only shook her head. Simon saw that his wife was not pleased, but he pretended not to notice anything and took his guest by the arm.

‘Sit down, friend,’ he said, ‘and let us have some supper.’

The man sat down.

‘Haven’t you cooked anything for us?’ said Simon.

Matrena was so angry that she could no longer be silent. ‘I have cooked, but not for you. It seems to me that you have drunk your senses away. You went to buy a sheepskin coat, but you come home without even the coat you had on, and you bring a good-for-nothing fellow home with you. I have no supper for drunkards* like you.’

‘That’s enough, Matrena. Don’t talk until you know what has happened! Why not ask what kind of man—’

‘And why don’t you tell me what you’ve done with the money?’

Simon took the three-rouble note from the pocket of the under-coat and spread it out.

‘Here is the money. Trifonov did not pay, but promises to pay soon.’

Matrena got still more angry; he had bought no sheepskins, but had put his only coat on some fellow and had even brought him to their house.

She quickly picked up the note from the table to put it away safely, and said, ‘I have no supper for you. We cannot feed all the good-for-nothing drunkards in the world.’

‘There now, Matrena, be quiet for a moment. First hear what I have to say—!’

‘I shall not hear much that is wise from a fool who

has been drinking ! I was right not to want to marry you—a drunkard ! You drank so much that we had to sell the bedclothes my mother gave me ; and now you've had money to buy a coat—and have spent that on drink too !'

Simon tried to explain to his wife that he had only spent twenty kopeks, and tried to tell her how he had found the man—but Matrena would not give him a chance to speak. She talked without stopping, and spoke of things that had happened ten years before.

Matrena talked and talked, and at last she went up to Simon and pulled at the sleeve* of his coat.

'Give me my coat ! It is the only one I have, and yet you choose to take it from me and wear it yourself. Give it to me, you dog, and may the Devil* take you !'

Simon began to pull off the coat, and turned one sleeve of it inside out ; Matrena pulled the coat and tore it. She picked it up, put it over her head and went to the door. She meant to go out, but stopped, for she was still angry and wanted to go on talking. She also wanted to learn what kind of man the guest was.

4

So Matrena stopped and said, 'If he were a good man he would have some clothes on. Why, he has not even a shirt on him. If the fellow were all right you would say where you met him.'

'That is just what I *am* trying to tell you,' said Simon. 'As I came to the shrine I saw him sitting there with no clothes on and very cold. God sent me

to him or he would have died. What was I to do? How do we know what may have happened to him? So I took him, clothed him and brought him here. Don't be so angry, Matrena. It is wrong to get angry. Remember, we must all die one day.'

Matrena was about to make an angry reply, but she looked at the stranger and was silent. He sat on the edge of the seat, without moving. His hands were folded on his knees. His head was bent forward on to his chest. His eyes were closed, and he seemed to be suffering. Matrena was silent and Simon said, 'Matrena, have you no love of God?'

Matrena heard these words, and, as she looked at the stranger, suddenly she pitied* him. She came back from the door, went to the stove and got the supper. She put a cup on the table and poured out some home-made beer.* Then she brought out the last piece of bread and a knife and spoons.

'Eat, if you want to,' said she.

Simon helped the stranger to come to the table; then he cut the bread and dropped pieces into his soup,* and they began to eat. Matrena sat at the corner of the table, rested her head on her hand and looked at the stranger.

Matrena felt great pity for the newcomer and began to like him. And at once a light seemed to shine from his face, which no longer had a look of pain. He raised his eyes and smiled at Matrena.

When they had finished supper, the woman cleared away the bowls and began asking the newcomer questions. 'Where are you from?' said she.

‘ I do not come from this district.’

‘ But how did you happen to be on the road ? ’

‘ I am not allowed to tell.’

‘ Did some one rob you ? ’

‘ God punished me.’

‘ And you were lying there with no clothes on ? ’

‘ Yes, with no clothes on, and very cold. Simon saw me and pitied me. He took off his coat, put it on me and brought me here. And you have fed me, given me drink and pitied me. God will be pleased with you ! ’

Matrena rose and gave to the stranger Simon’s old shirt which she had been mending. She also gave him a pair of trousers.

‘ There,’ said she, ‘ I see you have no shirt. Put this on and lie down where you please, up there under the roof, or down here on the stove.’

Matrena lay down and pulled her coat over her body, but she did not sleep, for she could not forget the visitor.

She remembered that he had eaten their last piece of bread and that there was none left for the next day. She thought of the shirt and trousers she had given away, and was angry. But when she remembered how he had smiled, her heart was glad.

Matrena lay awake for hours, and she noticed that Simon was awake too. She pulled at his coat.

‘ Simon ! ’

‘ What is it ? ’

‘ You have had the last of the bread, and I have not mixed any more. I do not know what we shall do

to-morrow. Perhaps I can borrow some from our friend Martha.'

'If we are alive, we shall find something to eat.'

The woman lay still for a while and then said, 'He seems to be a good man, but why does he not tell us who he is?'

'I suppose he has good reasons.'

'Simon!'

'What is it?'

'We give, but why does nobody give us anything?'

Simon did not know what to say, so he only said, 'Let us stop talking,' and turned over and went to sleep.

5

When Simon awoke in the morning his children were still asleep, and his wife had gone to another peasant's house to borrow some bread. But the stranger was sitting in the room dressed in the old shirt and trousers and was looking upwards. His face was brighter than it had been the day before.

Simon said to him, 'Well, friend, your body must be fed and clothed. You must work. What work do you know?'

'I do not know any.'

This surprised Simon, but he said, 'Men who want to learn can learn anything.'

'Men work, and I also will work.'

'What is your name?'

'Michael.'

‘ Well, Michael, if you don’t wish to talk about yourself that is your own business ; but you must earn your own bread. If you will work as I tell you, I will give you food and a place to sleep.’

‘ May God bless you ! I will learn. Show me what to do.’

Simon took some strong cotton thread* and rubbed it between his finger and thumb.

‘ It is quite easy—see ! ’

Michael watched him, then took some thread in the same way. He soon learnt how to do it, and twisted the thread round and round.

Then Simon showed him how to put wax* on the thread, and Michael was soon able to do this too. Next Simon showed him how to sew, and Michael learnt this also, at once.

He understood whatever Simon showed him, and after three days he was working as if he had sewn boots all his life. He worked without stopping and ate little. When work was over he sat silently, looking upwards. He seldom went into the street, and spoke only when it was necessary to speak. He neither joked nor laughed. They never saw him smile after that first evening, when Matrena gave him supper.

Day by day and week by week the year passed. Michael lived with Simon and worked for him. He became so famous that people said that no one sewed boots so tightly and so strongly as Simon's workman, Michael ; from all over the district people came to Simon for their boots, and he began to be wealthy.

One winter day, as Simon and Micháel sat working, a carriage drawn by three horses stopped outside the house. Then a fine servant jumped down and opened the door of the carriage. \ A gentleman wearing a fur coat got out and walked up to Simon's house. Matrena jumped up and opened the door wide. The gentleman bent his head to come in, and when he stood up straight again his head nearly touched the roof, and he seemed to fill half the room.

Simon rose, bowed and looked at the gentleman with extreme surprise. He had never seen anyone like him. Simon himself and Michael were thin, but this man was like someone from another world : red-faced, big and fat, with a very thick neck, and looking as if he were made of iron.

The gentleman breathed loudly, threw off his fur coat, sat down, and said, ' Which of you is the chief bootmaker ? '

' I am, my lord,' said Simon, coming forward.

Then the gentleman shouted to his servant, ' Hey, Fedka, bring the leather ! '

The servant ran in, carrying a parcel. The gentleman took the parcel and put it on the table.

‘Untie it,’ said he, and the servant untied it.

The gentleman pointed to the leather.

‘Look here, shoemaker,’ said he, ‘do you see this leather?’

‘Yes, my lord.’

‘But do you know what sort of leather it is?’

Simon felt the leather and said, ‘It is good leather.’

‘Good, indeed! Why, you fool, you never saw such leather before in your life! It’s German, and cost twenty roubles.’

Simon was frightened, and said, ‘Where should I ever see leather like that?’

‘That is true! Now, can you make it into boots for me?’

‘Yes, my lord, I can.’

Then the gentleman shouted at him, ‘You can, can you? Well, remember who you are to make them for, and how good the leather is! You must make me boots that will last for a year. The shape must not change and the sewing must not burst. If you can do it, take the leather and cut it out; but if you cannot, say so. I tell you now that if the sewing bursts or the shape changes, I will have you put in prison. If the boots do not burst or change their shape for a year, I will pay you ten roubles for your work.’

Simon was frightened and did not know what to say. He looked at Michael and touched him on his arm. ‘Shall I take the work?’ he said in a quiet voice.

Michael made a sign as if to say, ‘Yes, take it.’

Simon did as Michael advised and promised to

make boots which would not change their shape or burst for a whole year.

The gentleman called his servant and told him to pull the boot off his left leg, which he stretched out.

‘Measure my foot!’ said he.

Simon sewed a paper measure seventeen inches long, pressed it smooth, went down on his knees and after making sure that his hands were quite clean, began to measure. He measured the length of the foot and across the toes, and began to measure round the leg, but the paper was too short. The leg was as thick as a gate-post.

‘Take care that you do not make the boot too tight round the leg,’ shouted the red-faced man.

Simon sewed another strip of paper. The gentleman moved his toes about in his stocking and looked round at those in the room. As he did so he noticed Michael.

‘Who is that?’ he asked.

‘He is my workman. He will sew the boots.’

‘Take care!’ said the gentleman to Michael. ‘Remember to make them so that they will last for a year.’

Simon also looked at Michael and saw that Michael was looking not at the gentleman, but into the corner behind the gentleman, as if he saw someone there. Michael looked and looked, and suddenly he smiled, and his face became brighter.

‘What are you laughing at, you fool?’ shouted the gentleman angrily. ‘Take care to see that the boots are ready when I need them.’

‘They shall be ready when you need them,’ said Michael.

‘Take care that it is so,’ said the gentleman, and he put on his boots and his fur coat, pulled the coat round his shoulders and went to the door. But he forgot to bend his head and struck it against the door-post. He swore* terribly as he rubbed his head. Then he walked to his carriage and drove away.

When he had gone, Simon said, ‘What a strong and fine-looking man ! He almost knocked out the door-post, but it didn’t hurt him.’

And Matrena said, ‘He ought to grow strong with all his good food and wealth. Death itself cannot touch such a rock as he is.’

7

Then Simon said to Michael, ‘Well, we have taken the work, but we must be careful that we do not get into trouble because of it. The leather is very costly, and the gentleman can get very angry. We must make no mistakes. Come, your eyes are better and your hands have become quicker than mine. Take this measure and cut out the boots. I will finish the sewing.’

Michael did as he was told. He took the leather, spread it out on the table, folded it in two, took a knife and began to cut it.

Matrena came and watched him cutting, and was surprised to see how he was doing it. Matrena was used to seeing boots made, and she looked and saw

that Michael was not cutting the leather for boots, but was cutting it round.

She wished to say something, but she thought to herself, 'Perhaps I do not understand how to make gentlemen's boots. I suppose Michael knows more about it. I will say nothing.'

When Michael had cut up the leather he took a thread and began to sew, not with two ends, as boots are sewn, but with a single end, as soft house-shoes are made.

Again Matrena wondered, but again she said nothing. Michael went on sewing steadily until noon. Then Simon got up from his seat to have dinner, looked around, and saw that Michael had made house-shoes out of the gentleman's leather.

'Ah !' cried Simon sadly, and he thought, 'How could Michael, who has been with me a whole year and never made a mistake before, do such a terrible thing?' The gentleman ordered high boots—and Michael has made house-shoes and has wasted the leather. What am I to say to the gentleman? I can never buy any more leather like this.'

And he said to Michael, 'What are you doing, friend? You have done a terrible thing to me! You know the gentleman ordered high boots, but see what you have made!'

As he was saying this someone knocked at the door. They looked out of the window; a man was fastening his horse to the gate-post. They opened the door, and the servant who had been with the gentleman came in.

‘ Good day,’ said he.

‘ Good day,’ replied Simon. ‘ What can we do for you ? ’

‘ My mistress has sent me about the boots.’

‘ What about the boots ? ’

‘ My master no longer needs them. He is dead.’

‘ What ! ’ said Simon. ‘ Did you say “ dead ” ? ’

‘ He did not get home alive after he left you, but died in the carriage. When we reached home and the servants came to help him to get out, he rolled over like a bag. He was dead already, and so stiff that we could hardly get him out of the carriage. My mistress sent me here. “ Tell the bootmaker,” she said, “ that the gentleman who ordered the boots and left the leather for them no longer needs the boots. He must quickly make house-shoes for the dead body. Wait till they are ready and bring them back with you.” That is why I have come.’

Michael picked up the rest of the leather, rolled the pieces up, took the house-shoes he had made, rubbed them on his coat, and gave them and the roll of leather to the servant, who took them and said, ‘ Good-bye, masters, and good day to you ! ’

8

Another year passed, and another, until Michael had lived with Simon for six years. He lived as he did before. He went nowhere and spoke only when it was necessary. In all those years he had smiled only twice—once when Matrena gave him food, and the

second time when the gentleman was in their house. Simon was very pleased with his workman. He never now asked Michael where he came from, and his one fear was that Michael would go away.

They were all at home one day. Matrena was cooking, and the children were playing on the seats and looking out of the window. Simon was sewing at one window, and Michael was finishing a shoe at the other.

One of the boys ran along the seat to Michael, and resting on his shoulder looked out of the window.

‘Look, Uncle¹ Michael ! There is a lady with two little girls ! She seems to be coming here. And one of the girls is lame.’*

When the boy said that, Michael dropped the shoe, turned to the window and looked out into the street.

Simon was surprised. Michael did not usually look out into the street, but now he pressed against the window, looking at something with wide open eyes. Simon also looked out and saw that a well-dressed woman was coming to his house. She led by the hand two little girls in fur coats. It was hard to see any difference between the girls except that one of them was lame in the left leg and walked unevenly.

The woman opened the door and let the two girls enter the house first. Then she followed them in.

‘Good day, good people !’ she said.

‘Please come in,’ said Simon. ‘What can we do for you ?’

¹ ‘Uncle’ is often used by children in addressing friends of their parents who are not relations.

The woman sat down by the table. The two little girls pressed close to her knees, afraid of the people in the house.

‘I want you to make leather shoes for these two little girls, in time for the spring.’

‘We can do that. We have never made such small shoes, but we can make them, and in any fashion you like. My man, Michael, is a master at the work.’

Simon looked quickly at Michael and saw that he had left his work and was sitting with his eyes fixed on the little girls. Simon was surprised. It was true that the girls were pretty, but still Simon could not understand why Michael should look at them like that—just as if he had known them before. He wondered greatly, but went on talking with the woman and arranging the price of the shoes. When the price was fixed, he prepared a measure. The woman drew the girl with the lame leg towards her and said, ‘Take two measures from this little girl. Make one shoe for the lame foot and three for the good one. They both have the same sized feet. They are twins.’*

Simon took the measure and, speaking of the girl whose foot was lame, said, ‘How did it happen to her? She is such a pretty girl. Was she born like this?’

‘No, her mother crushed* her leg.’

Then Matrena spoke. She wondered who this woman was and whom the children belonged to, so she said, ‘Are you not their mother, then?’

‘No, my good woman; I am neither their mother nor any relation to them. They were quite unknown to me, but I took care of them.’

‘ They are not your children and yet you love them so much ? ’

‘ How can I avoid loving them ? I fed them both when they were tiny babies. I had a child of my own, but God took him. I did not love him so dearly as I now love these girls.’

‘ Then whose children are they ? ’

9

Now that the woman had begun to talk, she told them the whole story.

‘ About six years ago their parents died, both in the same week. Their father was buried on the Tuesday, and their mother died on the Friday. These poor children were born three days after their father’s death, and their mother did not live another day. My husband and I were then living as peasants in the village. Their house was next to ours. Their father was a lonely man, a wood-cutter in the forest. One day when he was cutting down a tree it fell on him and crushed him. They hardly got him home before his soul went to God, and the same week these little girls were born. His wife was poor and alone ; she had no one, young or old, with her. She was alone when they were born, and alone when she died.

‘ The next morning I went to see her, but when I entered the house she was already dead. As she died she had rolled on to this child and crushed her leg. The village people buried her, but the babies were left alone. I did not know what to do with them :

my own first baby was only eight weeks old. So I took them for a time. The peasants met together and thought hard what to do with them ; and at last they said to me, " It will be best if you keep the girls, Mary, and later we will arrange what to do with them."

' So I nursed the strong one ; but at first I did not feed the one with the crushed leg. I did not suppose that she would live. But then I thought to myself, why should the poor child suffer ? So I fed my own boy and these two—all three of them. And it happened that these two grew up, but my own child was buried before he was two years old. My husband is now working for the corn merchant at the mill. The pay is good, and we have enough money to live in comfort. But I have no children of my own, and how lonely I should be without these little girls ! How can I help loving them ? They are the joy of my life !'

As the woman spoke her eyes filled with tears, and Matrena said, ' It is a true saying : " A man may live without father or mother, but he cannot live without God." '

As they talked together, the whole house was suddenly filled with a bright light from the corner where Michael sat. They all looked towards him and saw him sitting, with his hands resting on his knees, looking up and smiling.

The woman went away with the girls. Michael rose from the seat and put down his work. Then, bowing low to Simon and his wife, he said, 'Good-bye, masters. God has forgiven me. I ask you too to forgive me for anything I have done wrong.'

And they saw that a light shone from Michael. And Simon rose, bowed low to Michael and said. 'I see, Michael, that you are no common man, and I cannot keep you or ask you questions. But tell me this : how is it that when I found you and brought you home, you were sad, and when my wife gave you food you smiled at her and looked brighter ? Then, when the gentleman came to order the boots, you smiled again and became brighter still ? And just now, when this woman brought the little girls, you smiled a third time and have become as bright as day ? Tell me, Michael, why does your face shine so, and why did you smile those three times ?'

And Michael answered, 'Light shines from me because I have been punished, but now God has pardoned me. And I smiled three times because God sent me to learn three truths, and I have learnt them. I learnt the first when your wife was kind to me, and that is why I smiled the first time. I learnt the second when the rich man ordered the boots, and then I smiled again. And now, when I saw those little girls, I learnt the third and last truth, and I smiled the third time.'

And Simon said, 'Tell me, Michael, why did God

punish you and what were the three truths? I, too, would like to know them.'

And Michael answered : ' God punished me because I did not obey him. I was an angel* in heaven and I did not obey God's command. God sent me to bring a woman's soul to him. I flew to earth, and saw a sick woman lying alone. She had just borne twin girls. They moved weakly at their mother's side. When she saw me, she understood that God had sent me for her soul, and she cried and said, " Angel of God ! My husband has just been buried, killed by a falling tree. I have neither sister nor aunt nor mother : no one to take care of my little children. Do not take my soul ! Let me nurse my babies, feed them and make them strong, before I die. Children cannot live without father or mother." And I listened to her. I placed the two children in her arms and returned to the Lord in heaven. I flew to the Lord and said, " I could not take the soul of the mother. Her husband was killed by a tree ; the woman has twins and prays that her soul may not be taken. She says : ' Let me nurse and feed my children and make them strong. Children cannot live without father or mother.' I have not taken her soul." And God said, " Go take the mother's soul, and learn three truths. Learn *What lives in man, What is not allowed to man, and What men live by*. When you have learnt these things you shall return to heaven." So I flew again to earth and took the mother's soul. The babies fell from her arms. Her body rolled over on the bed and crushed one baby's

leg. I rose above the village, because I wished to take her soul to God, but a wind took hold of me and my wings dropped off. Her soul rose alone to God, while I fell to earth by the side of the road.'

II

So Simon and Matrena understood who it was that had lived with them, and to whom they had given clothes and food. They cried with joy. And the angel said, 'I was alone in the field, with no clothes on. I had never known human needs, cold or hunger, till I became a man. I saw, near the field I was in, a shrine built for God, and I went to it hoping to find cover. But the shrine was locked and I could not enter. So I sat down behind the shrine to be out of the wind. When evening came I was hungry, cold, and in pain. Suddenly I heard a man coming along the road. He carried a pair of boots and was talking to himself. For the first time since I became a man I saw a human face, and his face seemed terrible to me and I turned away from it. And I heard the man talking to himself of how to cover his body from the cold in winter, and how to feed his wife and children. And I thought, "I am dying of cold and hunger and here is a man who is thinking only of how to clothe himself and his wife, and how they are to get bread for themselves. He cannot help me." When the man saw me he looked angry and became still more

terrible, and passed me by on the other side of the road. I was filled with despair ; but suddenly I heard him coming back.

‘I looked up and could hardly believe that it was the same man. Before, I had seen death in his face ; but now he was alive, and I saw in him the presence of God. He came up to me, clothed me, took me with him and brought me to his home. I entered the house, and a woman came to meet us. The woman was more terrible than the man had been. The spirit of death came from her mouth. I could not breathe because of the smell of death that spread around her. She wished to drive me out into the cold, and I knew that if she did so she would die. Suddenly her husband spoke to her of God, and the woman changed immediately. And when she brought me food and looked at me, I noticed that death was no longer present in her ; she had become alive, and in her too I saw God.

‘Then I remembered the first lesson God had given me to learn : “*Learn what lives in man.*” And I understood that Love lives in man. I was glad that God had already begun to show me what He had promised, and I smiled for the first time. But I had not yet learnt all. I did not yet know *What is not allowed to man* and *What men live by*.

‘I lived with you and a year passed. . A man came to order boots that were to last for a year without changing their shape. I looked at him and suddenly, behind him, I saw my friend, the angel of death. None except me saw that angel ; but I knew him, and

I knew that before the sun went down he would take that rich man's soul. And I thought to myself, "This man is preparing for a year and does not know that he will die before evening." And I remembered God's second saying, "*Learn what is not allowed to man.*"

'I already knew what lives in man. Now I learnt what is not allowed to him. Man is not allowed to know his own needs. And I smiled for the second time. I was glad to have seen the angel who was my friend—glad also that God had made the second saying clear to me.

'But still I did not know all. I did not know *What men live by*. And I lived on, waiting till God should teach me the last lesson. In the sixth year the girl-twins came with the woman ; and I saw that they were the same girls and heard how they had been kept alive. When I had heard the story, I thought, "Their mother begged me to let her live for the sake of her children, and I believed her when she said that children cannot live without father or mother ; but a strange woman has nursed them and cared for them."

'And when the woman showed her love for the children that were not her own and wept over them, I saw in her the living God and understood *What men live by*. And I knew that God had taught me the last lesson and had forgiven my sin. And then I smiled for the third time.'

Then the angel's clothes fell from him, but he was clothed in light so that no eye could look on him; and his voice grew louder, as though it did not come from him but from heaven above. And the angel said, 'I have learned that all men live, not by caring for themselves, but by love.'

And the angel sang praise to God, so that the house shook at his voice. The roof opened, and a long tongue of fire rose from earth to heaven. Simon and his wife and children fell to the ground, and the angel rose into the heavens.

And when Simon looked up a minute later, the house stood as it had stood before, and there was no one in it but his own family.



Little Girls Wiser than Men

It was an early Easter.* Snow still lay in the gardens, and water ran in streams down the village street.

Two little girls from different houses happened to meet in a narrow road between two small farms, where the dirty water after running through the farm-yards* had formed a large pool.* One girl was very small, the other a little bigger. Their mothers had put new dresses on both of them. The little one was dressed in blue, the other in yellow, and both had red cloths round their heads. They had just come from church, and first they showed each other their fine clothes, and then they began to play. Soon they had the idea of splashing about in the water, and the smaller one was going to step into the pool, shoes and all, when the elder stopped her.

‘Don’t go in like that, Malasha,’ said she. ‘Your mother will be angry with you. I will take off my shoes and stockings, and you take off yours.’

They did so ; and then, holding their skirts above their knees, began walking towards each other through the pool. The water came over Malasha’s feet, and she said : ‘It is deep, Akulya, I’m afraid !’

‘Come on,’ replied the other. ‘Don’t be frightened. It won’t get any deeper.’

When they got near one another, Akulya said :
' Mind, Malasha, don't splash. Walk carefully ! '

She had only just said this when Malasha's foot came down so heavily that Akulya's dress was splashed, and so were her eyes and nose. When she saw the dirty marks, she became angry and ran after Malasha to strike her. Malasha was frightened and saw that she had got herself into trouble. Quickly she stepped out of the water and started to run home. Just then Akulya's mother happened to be passing. She saw that her daughter's skirt was splashed and dirty, and said angrily : ' You bad, dirty girl, what have you been doing ? '

' Malasha did it on purpose,' answered the girl.

When she heard this, Akulya's mother caught hold of Malasha and hit her on the back of the neck. Malasha began to cry so loudly that she could be heard all down the street. Her mother came out.

' Why are you beating my girl ? ' said she, and began shouting angrily at her neighbour.* At once they were quarrelling fiercely. The men came out and there was soon a crowd in the street, everyone shouting and no one listening. They all went on quarrelling, till one gave another a push, and they were near to fighting when Akulya's old grandmother stepped among them and tried to make them be quiet.

' What are you thinking of, friends ? Is it right to behave like this ? On a day like this, too ! Easter is a time for joy and not for quarrelling.'

They would not listen to the old woman, and nearly knocked her down. And she would not have been

able to keep the crowd quiet but for Akulya and Malasha themselves. While the women were shouting at each other, Akulya had cleaned the mud off her dress and gone back to the pool. She took a sharp stone and began digging away the earth in front of the pool to let the water run out into the street. Soon Malasha joined her and, with a small stick, helped her to dig. Just as the men were beginning to fight, the water ran streaming into the street towards the very place where the old woman was trying to keep the men quiet. The girls followed it, one running each side of the little stream into which Malasha had dropped her stick.

‘Catch it, Malasha ! Catch it !’ shouted Akulya, and Malasha was laughing so much that she could not speak.

Filled with delight, as they watched the stick sailing along their stream, the little girls ran straight into the group of men. The old woman saw them, and said to the men : ‘Are you not ashamed of yourselves ? Here you are fighting on account of these girls, when they themselves have forgotten all about it and are playing happily together. Dear little things ! They are wiser than you !’

The men looked at the little girls and were ashamed. They laughed at themselves and each went back to his own home.

Unless you change, and become like little children, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of heaven.



How Much Land does a Man Need?

I

An elder sister came to visit her younger sister in the country. The elder was married to a merchant in town, the younger to a peasant in the village. As the sisters sat drinking their tea and talking, the elder began to talk proudly of the advantages of town life, saying in what comfort they lived there, how well they dressed, what fine clothes her children wore, what good things they ate and drank, and how she went to the theatre and other amusements.

The younger sister did not like this at all, and in turn spoke ill of the life of a merchant and praised the life of a peasant.

‘I would not change my way of life for yours,’ said

she. 'We may live roughly, but at least we have no worries. You may have better food and clothes and more amusements than we have, but though you often earn more than you need, you may easily lose all you have. People who are rich one day are often begging their bread next day. Our way is safer. Though a peasant's life is not a rich one, it is a long one. We shall never have a lot of money, but we shall always have enough to eat.'

'Enough!' laughed the older sister. 'Yes, if you want to live like the animals! What do you know of fine living and good manners! However hard your husband may work, you will die as you are living—on a waste heap—and your children also!'

'Well, what of that?' replied the younger sister. 'Of course our work is rough and hard. But it is also sure, and we need not bow down to anyone. But you, in your towns, have all kinds of trouble; to-day all may be well, but to-morrow the Devil may lead your husband into wrong-doing with cards* or wine, and all will be lost. Such things happen often!'

Pahom, the master of the house, was lying on the top of the stove and he listened to the women's talk.

'It is perfectly true,' he said. 'We peasants are so busy growing food in the fields from the time we are children, that we have no time to let any foolish ideas get into our heads. Our only trouble is that we have not enough land. If I had plenty of land I should not fear even the Devil himself!'

The women finished their tea, talked for a while

about dress, and then cleared away the tea-things and lay down to sleep.

But the Devil had been sitting behind the stove and had heard all that was said. He was pleased that the peasant's wife had caused her husband to talk so proudly, and that he had said that if he had plenty of land he would not fear even the Devil himself.

'All right,' thought the Devil. 'We will have a test. I will give you enough land; and because of that land I will get you into my power.'

2

Near the village there lived a lady who owned about three hundred acres* of land. The peasants had always liked her until she put an old soldier in charge of her land, and he began to annoy the people by making them pay fines.* Although Pahom tried to be very careful, again and again one of his horses went into the lady's corn, a cow of his wandered into her garden, or his oxen got into her fields—and always he had to pay a fine.

Each time Pahom paid the fine unwillingly, and then went home in anger and was rough with his family. All through that summer Pahom was in trouble because of this old soldier, and he was even glad when winter came and the cattle had to be put under cover. Though he disliked having to buy hay for them when they could no longer feed in the fields, at least he was free from worrying about where they were.

In the winter the peasants heard that the lady was

going to sell her land and that the keeper of the inn on the main road was making an offer for it. This news troubled them greatly.

‘Indeed,’ they thought, ‘if the innkeeper gets the land, he will annoy us with fines more than the old soldier does. We all depend upon that land.’

So the peasants went, in the name of their Village Society, and asked the lady not to sell the land to the innkeeper, offering her a better price for it themselves. The lady agreed to let them have it. Then the peasants tried to arrange for the Society to buy the whole of it, so that they might all share it. They met twice to discuss the question, but could not reach an agreement. The Devil spread doubt among them, and they would not trust one another. So they decided to buy the land separately, each taking as much as he could afford. And the lady agreed to this plan also.

Soon Pahom heard that a man who lived near him was buying fifty acres, and that the lady had agreed to accept a half of the payment in ready* money and wait a year for the other half. Pahom wished that he, too, could buy some land.

‘That is bad,’ he thought. ‘The land is all being sold, and I shall get none of it.’ So he spoke to his wife.

‘Other people are buying,’ said he, ‘and we must also buy forty acres at least. Life is becoming impossible. That fellow’s fines are ruining us.’

So they considered together how they could manage to buy it. They had saved one hundred roubles.

They sold a young horse and one half of their bees, and sent one of their sons out to work and took his pay in advance. They borrowed the rest of the money from a relation, and so collected half the price of the land.

When he had done this, Pahom chose a farm of forty acres, with fine woods, and went to the lady to make her an offer for it. They made a bargain, and he shook hands with her upon it and paid her a sum of money in advance. Then they went to town and signed the agreement. He paid half the price at once and promised to pay the rest before the end of two years.

So now Pahom had his own land. He borrowed seed and sowed it on the land he had bought. The harvest was a good one, and within a year he had managed to pay his debts both to the lady and to his relation. So he became a landowner, ploughing and sowing and making hay on his own land, cutting his own trees and feeding his cattle on his own grass. When he went out to plough his fields or to look at his growing corn, or at his fields of grass, his heart was full of joy. The grass and the flowers that grew there seemed to him unlike any that grew anywhere else. Before, when he had passed by that land, it had appeared the same as any other land, but now it seemed quite different.

So Pahom was very happy, and everything would have been right if only the peasants had not wandered on to his cornfields and grassland. He asked them most politely to keep away, but they did not. Sometimes the herdsmen would let the village cows wander into his fields ; sometimes horses would get into his corn. Pahom turned them out again and again, and forgave their owners, and for a long time he did not make use of the law. But at last he became impatient and took the matter to the District Court. He knew that the peasants only came on to his land because they had none themselves, and that they did not intend to do wrong, but he thought : ‘ I cannot go on letting it happen or they will destroy all I have. They must be taught a lesson.’

So he had them brought to the court, gave them one lesson, and then another, and two or three of the peasants had to pay fines. After a time the men who lived near Pahom began to dislike him because of this, and on some occasions they let their cattle go on to his land on purpose.

One peasant even went into Pahom’s wood at night and cut down five beautiful young trees in order to have their bark.* As Pahom passed through the wood one day he noticed something white. He came nearer and saw the stripped trees lying on the ground, and nearby stood the roots where the trees had been. Pahom was very angry. ‘ If he had only cut one tree here and there it would have been bad enough,’ Pahom

thought, 'but the fellow has actually cut down the whole group. If I could find out who did this I would punish him as he deserves.'

He thought hard who it could be. At last he decided: 'It must be Simon—no one else could have done it.' So he went to Simon's home to have a look round, but he found nothing, and only had an angry quarrel. However, he now felt very certain that Simon had done it, and he reported him. Simon was brought before the court. The case was heard twice, and at the end of it all Simon was let off, for there was no proof against him. Pahom felt still more wronged and turned angrily to the judges.

'You take money from robbers,' said he. 'If you were honest people yourselves you would not let a robber go free.'

So Pahom quarrelled with the judges and with everyone in his district. People began to threaten to burn his buildings. So though Pahom had more land, he was liked in the village much less than before.

About this time the peasants heard that many people were leaving this part of Russia to go to other parts.

'There is no need for me to leave my land,' Pahom thought. 'But some of the others may leave our village and then there will be more room for us. I will take their land myself and make my farm bigger. I can then live in greater comfort. At present I am shut in too much to be comfortable.'

One day Pahom was sitting at home when a peasant who was passing through the village happened to come

in. Pahom allowed him to stay for the night and gave him supper. He had a talk with this peasant and asked him where he came from. The stranger answered that he came from beyond the river Volga, where he had been working. One word led to another, and the man went on to say that many people were going to live in those lands. He told how some people from his village had settled there. They had joined a Society, and each of them had received twenty-five acres of land. This land was so good that the corn sown on it grew as high as a horse and was very thick. The stranger said that one peasant had brought nothing with him but his hands, and now he had six horses and two cows of his own.

Pahom's heart was filled with desire. He thought : ' Why should I suffer in this narrow hole, if men can live so well in other places ? I will sell my land and my home here, and with the money I will make a fresh start there and get everything new. We are always having trouble in this crowded place. But I must first go and find out all about it myself.'

When summer was near he got ready and started. He went down the river Volga on a steamer to Samara, and walked another three hundred miles, and at last reached the place. Everything was as the stranger had said. The peasants had plenty of land, for the Society had given every man twenty-five acres of land for his own use, and any one who had money could buy, at a rouble an acre, as much more good land as he wanted.

When Pahom had found out all he wished to know,

he returned home in the autumn and began to sell everything he had. He sold his land at a profit, and also his home and all his cattle. He waited only till the spring, and then started with his family to find a new home.

4

As soon as Pahom and his family reached their new home he applied to be admitted into the Society of a large village. The Society allowed him the use of a hundred and twenty-five acres in different fields as well as its own grassland. Pahom bought cattle and put up the buildings he needed in the village. He had three times as much land as he had owned before, and it was good corn-land. He was ten times wealthier than he had been. He had plenty of land for cultivation and for grass, and could keep as many cattle as he wished.

At first, in the excitement of building and living in his new home, Pahom was pleased with everything, but when he became used to it he began to think that even here he had not enough land. In the first year, he sowed wheat on his share of the Society's land, and had a good crop. He wanted to go on sowing wheat, but had not enough land for the purpose, for he could not sow his land again till it had rested and grass had grown over it. Many people wanted such land and there was not enough for all, so that there were quarrels about it. Those who were wealthy wanted to grow wheat and those who

were poor wanted to make money out of it through dealers.* Pahom wanted to sow more wheat, so he rented land from a dealer for a year. He sowed a lot of wheat and had a fine crop, but the land was too far from the village—the wheat had to be taken more than ten miles. After a time Pahom noticed that some peasant dealers were living on separate farms away from the Society's village and were becoming wealthy ; and he thought, ' If I were to buy some land of my own and have a separate farm on it, it would be quite a different thing. Then it would all be nice and convenient.' The idea of buying land of his own, instead of renting it, came into his mind again and again.

For three years he rented land and sowed wheat. The seasons and the crops were good, and he saved more money. He might have continued to live happily, but he grew tired of renting other people's land every year. Where the land was good the peasants used to rush for it and it was taken immediately, so that unless you were quick you got none. In the third year it happened that Pahom and a dealer together rented a piece of grassland from some peasants. When they had already ploughed it, there was a quarrel and the peasants went to law about it, and the result was that the work of ploughing was all lost.

' If it were my own land,' thought Pahom, ' I should not have all this trouble.'

So Pahom began looking for land which he could buy, and he met a peasant who had bought thirteen

hundred acres. This man had got into difficulties and was willing to sell again cheaply. Pahom bargained with him, and at last they decided on the price of 1,500 roubles, partly in ready money and partly to be paid later. When they had almost settled the matter, a passing dealer happened to stop at Pahom's house one day to get a feed for his horses. He drank tea with Pahom and they had a talk. The dealer said that he was just returning from the land of the Bashkirs* far away, where he had bought thirteen thousand acres of land, all for 1,000 roubles. Pahom asked him more questions, and the dealer said, 'All you need to do is to make friends with the chiefs. I gave away about one hundred roubles' worth of silk dresses and furnishings, besides a case of tea, and I gave wine to those who wished to drink it ; and I got the land for eight kopeks an acre.' He showed Pahom the papers about the sale, and said, 'The land lies near a river. The soil is good ; none of it has been cultivated before.'

Pahom asked him many questions, and the dealer said, 'Even if you walked for a year you could not cover all the land, and it all belongs to the Bashkirs. They are as simple as sheep, and you can get land almost for nothing.'

'Well,' thought Pahom, 'why should I get only thirteen hundred acres in exchange for my one thousand roubles ? If I take my money there I can get more than ten times as much for it.'

Pahom asked how to get to the place, and as soon as the dealer had left him he prepared to go there himself. He left his wife to look after the farm and started on his journey, taking a servant with him. They stopped at a town on their way and bought a case of tea, some wine and other gifts, as the dealer had advised. They went on and on until they had gone more than three hundred miles, and on the seventh day they came to the tents* of the Bashkirs. All was as the dealer had said. The people lived on the plains by the river, in their tents. They did not cultivate the land or eat bread. Their herds of cattle and horses fed on the grass of the plains. The young horses were tied up behind the tents, and the mares* were driven to them twice a day. The men milked the mares, and the women made kumiss* and cheese from the milk. The men only cared about drinking kumiss and tea, eating meat, and playing tunes on their pipes. They were all strong and merry, and all through the summer they never thought of doing any work. They were simple people and could not speak Russian, but were very kind.

As soon as they saw Pahom they came out of their tents and crowded round their visitor. They found an interpreter* who explained what was said, and Pahom told them that he had come to see if he could buy some land. The Bashkirs seemed to be very glad ; they took Pahom and led him into one of the biggest tents. They made him sit in the best place in



They crowded round their visitor

comfort while they sat round him. They gave him tea and kumiss and killed a sheep for him and gave him meat to eat. Pahom took gifts out of his cart and gave them to the Bashkirs, and divided the tea among them. The Bashkirs were filled with delight. They talked among themselves, and then told the interpreter to explain their words to Pahom.

‘They wish to tell you,’ said the interpreter, ‘that they like you, and that it is their custom to do all they can to please a guest. You have given them gifts. Now tell them which of their possessions you like best, so that they may give them to you.’

‘The thing which pleases me best here,’ answered Pahom, ‘is your land. Our land is crowded and the soil is no longer fruitful. But you have plenty of land, and it is good land. I never saw such land before.’

The interpreter explained what Pahom had said. The Bashkirs talked among themselves for a short time. Pahom could not understand what they were saying, but saw that they were much amused and that they shouted and laughed. Then there was silence, and they looked at Pahom while the interpreter said, ‘They wish me to tell you that in exchange for your gifts they will gladly give you as much land as you want. You need only point it out with your hand and it will be yours.’

The Bashkirs talked again for a short time and began to argue. Pahom asked what they were arguing about. The interpreter told him, ‘Some of them think they ought to ask their Chief about the land and not do anything while he is absent. The others think that there is no need to wait for his return.’

While the Bashkirs were arguing, a man in a large fur cap arrived. They all stopped talking and stood up. The interpreter said, 'This is our Chief himself.'

Pahom immediately fetched the finest coat and five pounds of tea, and offered these to the Chief. The Chief accepted them and sat down in the place of honour. The Bashkirs at once began telling him something. The Chief listened for a while, and then made a sign with his head which demanded silence, and speaking Russian he said to Pahom, 'Well, let it be so. Choose whatever piece of land you like; we have plenty of it.'

'How can I take as much as I like?' thought Pahom. 'I must get an official paper to make it certain, or else now they may say, "It is yours," and afterwards they may take it away again.'

'Thank you for your kind words,' he said aloud. 'You have a lot of land, and I only want a little. But I should like to be sure which bit is mine. Could it not be measured and officially given to me? Life and death are in God's hands. You good people give it to me, but your children might wish to take it away again.'

'You are quite right,' said the Chief. 'We will give it to you officially.'

'I heard that a dealer had been here,' Pahom continued, 'and that you gave him a little land too, and signed the official papers. I should like to have it done in the same way.'

The Chief understood.

‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘that can be done quite easily. We have a law-writer, and we will go to town with you and have the papers properly signed.’

‘And what will be the price?’ asked Pahom.

‘Our price is always the same: one thousand roubles a day.’

Pahom did not understand.

‘A day? What measure is that? How many acres would that be?’

‘We do not know how to measure it,’ said the Chief. ‘We sell it by the day. You may have as much as you can go round on your feet in one day, and the price is one thousand roubles a day.’

Pahom was surprised.

‘But in one day you can get round a large district!’ he said.

The chief laughed.

‘It will all be yours!’ said he. ‘But there is one condition. If you do not return on the same day to the spot you started from, your money is lost.’

‘But how am I to mark the way that I have gone?’

‘Why, we shall go to any spot you like, and stay there. You must start from that spot and make your round, taking a spade with you. Make a mark wherever you think one is necessary. Each time you make a turn, dig a hole and make a heap of earth. You may make as large a course as you please, but before the sun sets you must return to the place you started from. All the land you cover will be yours.’

Pahom was delighted. He decided to start early

next morning. They talked for a short time, and after drinking some more kumiss and eating some more meat, they had tea again, and then night came on. They gave Pahom a soft bed to sleep on, and the Bashkirs went away for the night, promising to meet together the next morning at daybreak and ride out before sunrise to the spot they had chosen.

7

Pahom lay on the soft bed, but could not sleep. He thought all the time about the land.

‘What a large piece I will mark off!’ he thought. ‘I can easily walk thirty-five miles in a day. The days are long now, and there will be a great deal of land within a course of thirty-five miles. I will sell the poorer land, or the peasants can rent it from me. But I will choose the best and farm it. I will buy two pairs of oxen, and employ two more workers. About a hundred and fifty acres shall be ploughed and I will let cattle feed on the rest.’

Pahom lay awake all night and did not sleep until just before daybreak. Immediately, he had a dream. He thought that he was lying in that same tent and heard somebody laughing outside. He wondered who it could be, and he dreamed that he got up and walked out, and saw the Bashkir Chief sitting in front of the tent, holding his sides and laughing so much that he rolled about. Pahom went nearer to the Chief and asked, ‘What are you laughing at?’ But then he saw that it was not the Chief, but the dealer

who had recently stopped at his house and told him about the land. Just as Pahom was going to ask, 'Have you been here long?' he saw that it was not the dealer, but the peasant who had come up from the Volga, long ago, to Pahom's old home. Then he saw that it was not even the peasant, but the Devil himself, with the body of an animal, who sat there laughing. In front of him a man, wearing only a shirt and trousers, lay flat on the ground. And Pahom dreamed that he looked more carefully to see what kind of man it was that was lying there, and he saw that the man was dead, and that it was himself! He awoke terribly frightened.

'What terrible things one dreams!' he thought, and as he looked round he saw through the open door the first light of day.

'It's time to wake them up,' he thought. 'We ought to make a start.'

He got up, awoke his servant, who was sleeping in his cart, told him to get the horse ready, and went to call the Bashkirs.

'It's time to go to the plain to measure the land,' he said.

The Bashkirs got up and met together, and the Chief came too. Then they began drinking kumiss again, and offered Pahom some tea, but he would not wait.

'The time has come,' he said. 'Let us go.'

The Bashkirs got ready, and they all started; some were on horses, and some in carts. Pahom drove in his own small cart with his servant and took a spade with him. When they reached the plain, the red of

the morning was beginning to flame. They climbed up a small hill and, getting down from their carts and their horses, they met together in one spot. The Chief came up to Pahom and stretched out his arm towards the plain.

‘ See,’ said he, ‘ all this, as far as your eye can reach, is ours. You may have any part of it you like.’

Pahom’s eyes shone ; it was all uncultivated land, flat and black, and different kinds of grass grew in the low-lying parts almost up to a man’s shoulders.

The Chief took off his fur cap, placed it on the ground and said, ‘ This will be the mark. Start from here, and return here again. All the land you go round shall be yours.’

Pahom took out his money and put it on the cap. Then he took off his overcoat, remaining in his undercoat. He took his belt, tied it tightly round his middle, and put a little bag of bread inside his coat. Then he tied a bottle of water to his belt, fastened up the tops of his high boots, took the spade from his servant, and stood ready to start. He considered for a few moments which way he ought to go. Everywhere seemed good.

‘ It does not matter,’ he thought. ‘ I will go towards the rising sun.’

He turned his face to the east, stretched himself, and waited for the sun to come up.

‘ I must lose no time,’ he thought, ‘ and it is easier walking while it is still cool.’

The sun had hardly shone above the skyline, before Pahom, carrying the spade over his shoulder, went down into the plain.

Pahom started walking neither slowly nor quickly. After he had gone a thousand yards he stopped, dug a hole, and placed pieces of earth and grass one on another so that it could be easily seen. Then he went on ; and now that he was walking more freely he increased his speed. After a short time he dug another hole.

Pahom looked back. He could see the hill clearly in the sunlight, with the people on it, and the shining metal of the cart-wheels. Pahom made a rough guess that he had walked three miles. It was growing warmer. He took off his under-coat, put it across his shoulder and went on again. It was quite warm now ; he looked at the sun. It was time to think of breakfast.

‘ The first part is done, but there are four parts in a day and it is too soon yet to turn. But I will take off my boots,’ he said to himself.

He sat down, took off his boots, put them under his belt, and went on. It was easy walking now.

‘ I will go on for another three miles,’ he thought, ‘ and then turn to the left. This spot is so fine that it would be a shame to lose it. The farther one goes the better the land seems.’

He went straight on for a short time, and when he looked round he could scarcely see the hill. The people on it looked like black ants, and he could just see something shining there in the sun.

‘ Ah,’ thought Pahom. ‘ I have gone far enough this way, it is time to turn. Besides, I am very hot and thirsty.’

He stopped, dug a hole and made a heap by the side of it. Next he untied his bottle, had a drink and then turned sharply to the left. He went on and on ; the grass was high, and it was very hot.

Pahom began to grow tired ; he looked at the sun and saw that it was noon.

‘ Well,’ he thought, ‘ I must have a rest.’

He sat down and ate some bread and drank some water ; but he did not lie down, thinking that if he did he might fall asleep. After sitting a little while, he went on again. At first he walked easily, for the food had given him strength ; but it had become terribly hot and he felt sleepy. Still he went on, thinking, ‘ An hour to suffer, a lifetime to live.’

He went on in this way for a long time also, and was about to turn to his left again when he saw a damp low-lying area. ‘ It would be a shame to leave that out,’ he thought. ‘ Flax* would grow well there.’ So he went on, past the low-lying ground, and dug a hole on the other side of it before he turned the corner.

Pahom looked towards the hill. The heat made the air misty ; it seemed to be shaking and he could scarcely see the people on the hill through the mist.

‘ Ah,’ thought Pahom, ‘ I have made the sides too long ; I must make this one shorter.’ And he went along the third side, walking faster. He looked at the sun. It was nearly half-way down to the skyline, and he had not yet done two miles of the third side of the square. He was still ten miles from the hill.

‘ No,’ he thought, ‘ though it will make the shape of my land uneven, I must hurry back in a straight

land

line now. I might go too far, and I already have a great deal of land.'

So Pahom hurriedly dug a hole, and turned straight towards the hill.

8

Pahom went straight towards the hill, but he now walked with difficulty. He was tired with the heat, his feet were cut and hurt, and his legs were weak. He wished to rest, but it was not possible if he meant to get back before sunset. The sun waits for no man, and it was sinking lower and lower.

'Oh dear,' he thought, 'if only I had not made a mistake trying for too much! What will happen if I am too late?'

He looked towards the hill and at the sun. He was still far from the place. He began running, threw away his coat, his boots, his bottle, and his cap, and kept only the spade which he used as a support.

'What shall I do?' he thought again. 'I have tried to get too much and lost everything. I can't get there before the sun sets.'

And this fear made him breathe even harder. Pahom went on running, his soaking shirt and trousers stuck to him, and his mouth was very dry. His breathing was hard, his heart was beating like a hammer, and his legs were weak and felt as if they did not belong to him. Pahom was terribly frightened that he would die from the effort. Though afraid of death, he could not stop. 'They will call me a fool

if I stop now after I have run all that way,' he thought. And he ran on and on, nearer and nearer, and heard the Bashkirs calling and shouting to him. Their cries excited him still more. He gathered his last strength and ran on.

The sun was close to the skyline, and, with mist all around, it looked large and red as blood. It was just about to set. The sun was very low, but he was also quite near the hill. Pahom could already see the people on the hill waving their arms to make him hurry. He could see the fur cap on the ground, and the Chief sitting beside it holding his sides. And Pahom remembered his dream.

'There is plenty of land,' he thought, 'but will God let me live on it? I have lost my life, I have lost my life! I shall never reach that spot!'

Pahom looked at the sun, which had reached the earth: the bottom of it had already disappeared. With all his remaining strength he rushed on, bending his body forward so that his legs could hardly follow fast enough to keep him from falling. Just as he reached the hill it suddenly grew dark. He looked up—the sun had already set! He gave a cry. 'All my efforts have been useless,' he thought, and was about to stop, but he heard the Bashkirs still shouting, and remembered that though to him, down below, the sun seemed to have set, those on the hill could still see it. He breathed deeply and ran up the slope of the small hill. It was still light there. He reached the top and saw the cap. The Chief sat in front of it, laughing and holding his sides. Again Pahom

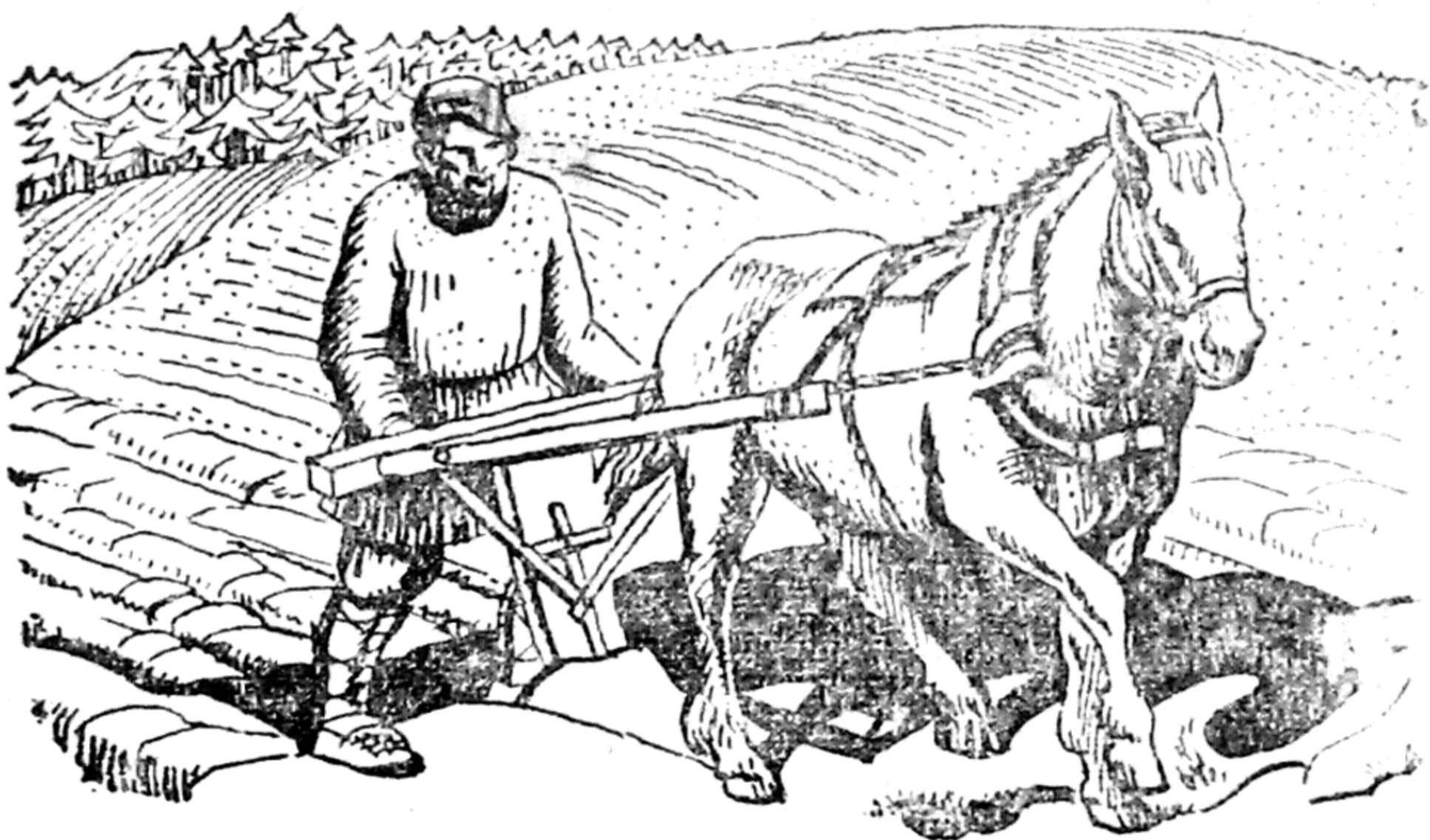
remembered his dream, and he gave a loud cry. His legs gave way beneath him, he fell forward and reached the cap with his hands.

‘ Ah, that’s a fine fellow ! ’ said the Chief. ‘ He has gained a lot of land ! ’

Pahom’s servant came running up and tried to raise him, but he saw that blood was flowing from his mouth. Pahom was dead ! The Bashkirs looked sad and showed their pity.

His servant picked up the spade and dug a hole long enough for Pahom to lie in, and buried him in it. Six feet from his head to his toes was all the land he needed.





The Imp and the Peasant's Bread

A poor peasant went off early one morning to plough, taking with him for his breakfast a piece of bread. He got his plough ready, put his coat round the bread, hid it under a bush and started work. After a while, when his horse was tired and he was hungry, the peasant stopped ploughing, let the horse loose to feed, and went to get his coat and his breakfast.

He lifted the coat, but the bread was gone! He looked and looked, turned the coat over and shook it, but the bread was gone. The peasant could not understand this at all.

‘That’s strange,’ he thought; ‘I saw no one, yet some one has been here and has taken the bread!’

It was an imp* who had stolen the bread while the peasant was ploughing, and at that moment he was

sitting behind the bush, waiting to hear the peasant swear and call on the name of the Devil.

The peasant was sorry to lose his breakfast, but, 'It cannot be helped,' said he. 'After all, I shall not die of hunger! No doubt, whoever took the bread needed it. May it do him good!'

He went to the well, had a drink of water and rested for a while. Then he caught his horse, fastened it to the plough and began ploughing again.

The imp was upset because he had not made the peasant do wrong, and he went to the Devil, his master, to report what had happened.

He came to the Devil and told how he had taken the peasant's bread, and how the peasant, instead of swearing, had said, 'May it do him good!'

The Devil was angry and replied, 'If the man got the better of you, it was your own fault—you don't understand your business! If the peasants and their wives do that kind of thing, we shall be lost. The matter can't be left like that! Go back at once and make things right. If in three years you don't get the better of that peasant, I'll have you thrown into holy water!'

The imp was frightened. He hurried back to earth, thinking how he could make up for his mistake. He thought and thought, and at last he thought of a good plan.

He changed himself into a working man and went to work with the poor peasant. The first year he advised the peasant to sow corn in a low-lying damp place. The peasant took his advice and sowed there.

The year happened to be a very dry one, and the crops of the other peasants were all burned up by the sun, but the poor peasant's corn grew thick and tall and heavy with grain. Not only had he enough grain to last him for the whole year, but he had also much to spare.

The next year the imp advised the peasant to sow on the hill, and it happened to be a wet summer. Other people's corn was beaten down and the ears did not fill, but the peasant's crop, on the hill, was a fine one. He had more grain to spare than before, so that he did not know what to do with it all.

Then the imp showed the peasant how he could crush the grain and make vodka from it; and the peasant made vodka and began to drink it himself and to give it to his friends.

So the imp went to the Devil, his master, and claimed proudly that he had now succeeded where he had failed before. The Devil said that he would come and see for himself.

He came to the peasant's house, and saw that the peasant had invited his wealthy friends and was giving them drinks. His wife was offering the drink to the guests, and as she took it round she fell against the table, and a glassful splashed on to the floor.

The peasant spoke angrily to his wife. 'What are you doing, you foolish woman? Do you think that this good drink is dirty water that you can pour all over the floor, you careless creature?'

The imp made a sign to the Devil, his master. 'See,' he said, 'that is the man who made no trouble when he lost his only piece of bread.'

The peasant still shouted angrily at his wife, and began to carry the drink to his guests himself. Just then a poor peasant, who had not been invited, came in, on his way from work. He greeted everyone, sat down, and saw that they were drinking. He was tired after his day's work, and felt that he would like a drop of vodka. He sat and sat, getting thirstier and thirstier, but the host did not offer him any, but only said, 'I cannot find drink for every one who comes here.'

This pleased the Devil; but the imp laughed happily and said, 'Wait. There is more to come yet!'

The rich peasants drank, and their host* drank too. And they began to say nice things about each other, and made speeches full of lies.

The Devil listened and listened, and praised the imp.

'If the drink makes them so much like foxes* that they begin to cheat each other, soon they will all be in our hands.'

'Wait for what is coming,' said the imp. 'Let them drink another glass each. Now they are like foxes, shaking their tails and trying to please each other, but soon you will see them like fierce wolves.'*

The peasants drank another glass each, and their talk became wilder and rougher. Instead of making soft speeches they began to grow angry and shout at one another. Soon they began fighting, and hit one another on the nose. The host joined in the fight, and he too was well beaten.

The Devil watched all this with great delight.

‘ This is fine,’ he said.

But the imp replied, ‘ Wait—the best is yet to come. Wait till they have had a third glass. Now they are fighting like wolves, but let them drink one more glass and they will be like pigs.’

The peasants had their third glass, and started to behave just like animals. They made strange noises and shouted, without knowing why, and did not listen to one another.

Then the guests began to go. Some went alone, some in twos, and some in threes, all walking unsteadily, first this way and then that along the street. The host went out to say good-bye to his guests, but he fell on his nose into some water, covered himself with mud from head to foot, and lay there making a noise like a pig.

This pleased the Devil even more.

‘ Well,’ he said, ‘ you have discovered a fine drink, and have quite made up for your mistake about the bread. But now tell me how this drink is made. I suppose you first put in fox’s blood, and that was what made the peasants as clever as foxes ? Then, I suppose, you added the blood of wolves ; that is what made them fierce like wolves ? And at the finish you must have put in the blood of pigs to make them behave like pigs.’

‘ No,’ said the imp, ‘ I did not do it that way. I only made certain that the peasant had more corn than he needed. The blood of wild animals is always in men ; but as long as men have only as much corn as they need, it is kept under control. At that time

the peasant did not make any trouble over losing his last piece of bread. But when he had corn to spare, he looked for ways of getting pleasure out of it. And I showed him a pleasure—drinking. And when he began to turn God's good gifts into strong drink for his own pleasure, the blood of the fox, the wolf and the pig in him all showed itself. If only he goes on drinking, he will always be a wild animal !'

The Devil praised the imp, forgave him for his former mistake and gave him a position of high honour.



A Tiny Spark* can Burn the House

Then Peter came to him and said, 'Lord, how often am I to forgive my brother for doing me wrong?—seven times?'

Jesus said to him, 'I do not say seven times, but seventy times seven.' In this way the Kingdom of Heaven is like a King on earth who wished to settle his accounts with his servants. When he had begun the accounts a man was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.* But because he had no money to pay with, his lord ordered him and his wife and children and all that he had to be sold to pay the money. So the servant fell down in front of him and said, 'Lord, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.' And his lord pitied him and set him free, and forgave him the debt. But the servant then went out, and, finding another servant who owed him a hundred denarii,* took him by the throat and said,

‘Pay me what you owe.’ The other servant fell at his feet and said, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay the whole amount.’ But he refused and went and threw him into prison until he could pay what he owed. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were very sorry, and they came and told their lord all that had been done. Then his lord called him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant, I forgave you all your debt because you begged me to ; ought you not also to have had mercy on the other servant, just as I had mercy on you ? ’ And his lord was angry, and handed him over for punishment until he paid all that he owed.

And that is what my Heavenly Father will do to you if you do not forgive your brothers from your hearts.—*St. Matthew xviii. 21-35.*

A peasant named Ivan once lived in a village. He lived in comfort, had reached the best years of his life, and besides being the hardest worker in the village he had three sons, all able to work. The eldest was married, the second about to marry, and the third was a big fellow who could look after the horses and was already learning to plough.

Ivan’s wife was a clever and careful housekeeper, and they had a quiet, hard-working daughter-in-law. There was nothing to prevent Ivan and his family from living happily. They had only one other person to feed ; that was Ivan’s old father, who suffered from a weak chest and had been lying ill on the top of the brick stove for seven years. Ivan had all he needed : four horses, a cow and fifteen sheep. The women made all the clothing for the family besides helping in the fields, and the men cultivated the land.

Their grain was always enough for their own wants until the next harvest or even after, and they sold enough of it to pay the taxes and satisfy their other needs.

So Ivan and his children might have lived quite happily if there had not been a quarrel between him and the man next door, lame Gabriel, the son of Gordey.

As long as old Gordey was alive and Ivan's father was still able to manage his home, the families lived as neighbours should. If the women of either house happened to want a barrel or a bag, or if the men needed a lamp, or if a cart-wheel got broken and could not be mended at once, they used to send to the other house for help, and help used to come. When a young cow wandered into the neighbour's farmyard they would just drive it out, and only say, 'Don't let it get in again, our grain is lying there.' Such things as locking up the farm buildings, hiding things from one another, or speaking evil behind one another's backs, were never thought of in those days.

That was when the fathers were alive and strong. When the sons became the heads of the families, everything changed.

A very small matter started all the trouble.

Ivan's daughter-in-law had a hen that began laying eggs rather early in the season, and she started collecting eggs for Easter. Every day she went to the cart shed* and found an egg in the cart; but one day the hen, frightened by the children, flew across the fence into the neighbour's yard and laid its egg

there. The woman heard the hen's noise, but said to herself, 'I have no time now ; I must make the house clean for Sunday. I'll get the egg later on.' In the evening she went to the cart, but found no egg there. She went and asked her mother-in-law and brother-in-law whether they had taken the egg. 'No, we have not,' they replied, but her youngest brother-in-law, Taras, said, 'Your hen laid its egg in the neighbour's yard. It was there that she was making a noise, and she flew back across the fence from there.'

The woman went and looked at the hen. There she was with the other chickens, her eyes just closing, ready to go to sleep. The woman wished she could ask the hen and get an answer from her.

Then she went to the neighbour's house, and Gabriel's mother came out to meet her.

'What do you want, young woman?'

'Why, Grandmother, one of my hens flew across into your yard this morning. Did she not lay an egg here?'

'We never saw anything of it. Our own hens started laying long ago. We collect our own eggs and have no need of other people's. And we don't go looking for eggs in other people's yards, my girl!'

The young woman was angry and said more than she should have done. Her neighbour answered back, and the women began shouting at each other. Ivan's wife, who had been to get water, happening to pass just then, joined in too. Gabriel's wife rushed out, and began blaming the young woman for some things



They began fighting .

that had really happened and for other things that had never happened at all. Then a general quarrel began, everyone shouting at once, trying to get out two words at a time and not using the politest words:

‘You’re this!’ and ‘You’re that!’ ‘You steal!’ and ‘You’re a dirty woman!’ and ‘You’re making your old father-in-law die of hunger!’ and ‘You’re a good-for-nothing!’ and so on; and ‘You’ve made a hole in that bag I lent you!’ and ‘It’s our pails* you’re carrying your milk in—you must give us back our pails.’

Then they caught hold of the pails and splashed the milk about everywhere, pulled one another’s hair, and began fighting. Gabriel, returning from the fields, stopped to help his wife. Out rushed Ivan and his son, and joined in with the rest. Iván was a strong fellow; he made them all run, and pulled a handful of hair out of Gabriel’s beard.* People came to see what was the matter, and it was a long time before the fighters were separated.

That was how it all began.

Gabriel put the hair from his beard into a piece of paper, and went to the District Court to start a law-suit* against Ivan. ‘I didn’t grow my beard,’ said he, ‘for ugly Ivan to pull it out.’ And his wife went to her neighbours and told them with great delight that Ivan would be sent to Siberia* as a punishment. And so the quarrel grew.

The old man, Ivan’s father, who still lay on top of the stove, tried from the very first to persuade his family to make peace, but they would not listen. He

told them, 'It's a stupid thing you are doing, children, quarrelling about such a small matter. Just think! The whole thing began about an egg. Perhaps the children took it—well, does it matter? What's the value of one egg? God sends enough for all! And suppose your neighbour did say an unkind word—put it right; show her how to say a better one! If there has been a fight—well, such things will happen; we all do wrong sometimes, but forget it and let the matter end. If you let your anger get out of control, it will be the worse for you yourselves.'

But the younger people would not listen to the old man. They thought his words were nothing but an old man's talk. Ivan would not shame himself before his neighbour.

'I never pulled his beard,' he said, 'he pulled the hair out himself. But his son has burst all the fastenings on my shirt and torn it—look at it!'

And Ivan also went to law. The case was heard by the Justice of the Peace* and by the District Court. While all this was going on a large iron pin disappeared from Gabriel's cart. Gabriel's relations said that Ivan's son had taken it. They said, 'During the night we saw him go past our window towards the cart; and a neighbour says he saw him offering the pin to the inn-keeper.'

So they went to law about that. And at home not a day passed without a quarrel or even a fight. The children too shouted at each other, copying their elders; and when the women happened to meet by the riverside where they went to wash their clothes,

their tongues worked harder than their arms, and every word was a bad one.

At first the peasants only called each other names ; but afterwards they began to use anything that lay near them as a weapon, and the children followed their example. Life became harder and harder for them. Ivan and Gabriel kept going to law at the Village Meeting and at the District Court and before the Justice of the Peace, until all the judges were tired of them. First Ivan was made to pay a fine, or go to prison ; then the same thing happened to Gabriel ; and the more they went to law the angrier they grew—like dogs that attack one another and get fiercer and fiercer the longer they fight. Somebody strikes one dog from behind and it thinks the other dog is biting it, and gets still fiercer. So these peasants went to law, and one or other of them was fined or was put in prison, but that only made them more and more angry with one another. ‘Wait a bit,’ they said, ‘and I’ll make you pay for it.’ And so it went on for six years. Ivan’s father lying on the top of the stove kept telling them again and again, ‘Children, what are you doing ? Stop all this fighting ; keep to your work, and stop hating each other—it will be better for all of you. The more you hate the worse it will be.’

But they did not listen to him.

In the seventh year, at a wedding,* Ivan’s daughter-in-law said that Gabriel had been caught stealing a horse. Gabriel had been drinking and was unable to control his anger. He gave the woman such a blow that she was in bed for a week.

Ivan was delighted. He went to the judge to make a charge against Gabriel. 'Now I shall get free from my neighbour. He will not escape going to prison, or to Siberia.' But Ivan's wish did not come true. The judge did nothing to Gabriel. The woman was examined, but she was now quite well and showed no sign of being hurt. Then Ivan went to the Justice of the Peace, but he passed the matter on to the District Court. Ivan then gave the clerk and the Elder* of the District Court a gallon of spirits, and Gabriel was punished by a beating. The result of the trial was read out to Gabriel by the clerk: 'The Court has decided that Gabriel Gordeev shall receive twenty blows with a stick at the District Court.'

Ivan too heard this and looked at Gabriel to see what he would do. Gabriel grew very pale, and turned round and went into the passage. Ivan followed him, meaning to look after the horse, and he heard Gabriel say, 'Very well! He will beat my back, and that will make it burn; but something of his may burn worse than that!'

When he heard these words, Ivan at once went back into the Court, and said, 'Respected judges! He says he will burn my house. Listen! Several persons are present who heard him say it.'

Gabriel was called back. 'Is it true that you said this?' they asked him.

'I haven't said anything. Beat me, if you wish. It seems that I alone am to suffer, although I am right, yet he is allowed to do as he wishes.'

Gabriel wished to say something more, but his

lips only shook with anger and he turned to the wall. Even the officials were frightened by his looks. 'He may do some harm to himself or to his neighbour,' they thought.

Then the old judge said, 'Look here, my men; you had better behave sensibly and end your quarrel. Was it right of you, friend Gabriel, to strike a woman? It was lucky you did not hurt her seriously. But think of what might have happened. Was it right? You had better admit what you did and beg his pardon. Then he will forgive you and we will alter the punishment.'

The clerk heard these words, and said, 'That is impossible, because of the law. As there was no agreement between the two sides, the court has decided on the punishment, which must be carried out.'

But the judge would not listen to the clerk.

'Keep your tongue still, my friend,' said he. 'The first of all laws is to obey God, who loves peace.' And the judge tried again to end the quarrel, but could not succeed. Gabriel would not listen to him.

'I shall be fifty next year,' said he, 'and have a married son, and have never been beaten in my life, and now because of that ugly man Ivan I have been ordered to be beaten. Am I to go and ask him to forgive me? No; I have suffered enough—Ivan shall have good reason to remember me.'

Again Gabriel's voice shook and he could say no more, but turned round and went out.

It was seven miles from the court to the village,

and it was late when Ivan reached home. He unfastened his horse, locked it up for the night, and entered his house. No one was there. The women had already gone to drive the cattle in, and the young men were not yet back from the fields. Ivan went in and sat down, thinking. He remembered how Gabriel had listened to the judge's words, and how pale he had become, and how he had turned to the wall. He thought how he himself would feel if he were to receive such a punishment, and he pitied Gabriel. Then he heard his old father up on the stove cough,* and saw him sit up and get down from the stove. The old man moved slowly to a seat and sat down. He was quite tired out with the effort and coughed for a long time before he was able to speak. Then, resting against the table, he said, 'Well, will he be punished?'

'Yes, by twenty blows with a stick,' answered Ivan.

The old man shook his head.

'It is bad,' said he. 'You are doing wrong, Ivan. Ah! it's very bad—not for him so much as for yourself! Well, they'll beat him. But will that do you any good?'

'He won't do it again,' said Ivan.

'What is it he won't do again? What has he done any worse than you?'

'Why, think of the harm he has done me!' said Ivan. 'He nearly killed my son's wife, and now he says that he will burn our house. Am I to thank him for it?'

The old man shook his head sadly and said, 'You go about the wide world, Ivan, while I have been

lying on the stove all these years, so you think you see everything and that I see nothing. Ah, my boy ! It's you who don't see ; hate closes your eyes. The wrongdoings of other people are before your eyes, but your own are behind your back. You see his badness, but not your own. If he were bad, but you were good, there would be no quarrel. Who pulled the hair out of his beard ? Who spoiled his hay ? Who dragged him to the law court ? Yet you blame him for everything. You live a bad life yourself, that's what is wrong ! It's not the way I used to live, my boy, and it's not the way I taught you. Is that the way his old father and I used to live ? We lived as neighbours should, and we had an easy time. But now ? The other day that soldier was telling us about the war. Why, there's a war on between you and Gabriel worse than that between our country and the Turks. Is that how to live ? How wrong it is ! You are a man and master of the house ; you are responsible. What are you teaching the women and children ? To quarrel and fight. Why, the other day, your Taraska—that simple fellow—was shouting at neighbour Irena, calling her names ; and his mother listened and laughed. Is that right ? No, boy ! Jesus, when He walked on earth, taught us fools something very different. If you get a hard word from anyone, be quiet, and then he will know at once that he is wrong. He will feel ashamed. He will soften and will listen to you.

‘Do you think the teaching of Jesus was wrong ? Why, it's all for our own good. Just think of your

earthly life ; are you better off, or worse, since this war began among you ? Just count up the money you have spent on all this law business—what the driving backwards and forwards and your food on the way to town have cost you !

‘ What fine fellows your sons have become ! With them you might live and get on well ; but now you are growing poorer. And why ? All because of this foolish quarrel ; because you must be proud. You ought to be working in the fields. The ploughing is not done in time, nor the sowing, and mother earth can’t bear properly. Why did the crops fail this year ? When did you sow them ? When you came back from the town ! And what did you gain ? A load for your own shoulders ! Eh, my boy, think of your own business ! Work with your boys in the field and at home, and if someone harms you forgive him, as God wishes you to. Then life will be easy and your heart will always be light.’

Ivan remained silent.

‘ Ivan, my boy, hear your old father ! Go and fasten the horse to the cart, and go at once to the Government office and end this affair there ; and in the morning go and make your peace in God’s name, and invite Gabriel to your house for to-morrow’s holiday. Have tea ready, and get a bottle of vodka and end this trouble for ever, and tell the women and children to do the same.’

Ivan was sad and thought, ‘ What he says is true,’ and his heart grew lighter. But he did not know how to begin to put matters right.

But again the old man spoke, as if he had guessed Ivan's thoughts.

'Go, Ivan, don't wait. Put out the fire before it spreads, or it will be too late.'

The old man was going to say more, but before he could do so the women came in, as noisy as a lot of birds. They had already heard that Gabriel was to receive twenty blows with a stick and had said he would burn the house down. They had added something of their own to this and had quarrelled with the women of Gabriel's family in the field. 'Gabriel's daughter-in-law intends to bring a fresh law-suit,' said one of the women, 'and Gabriel has been asking the examining magistrate to alter everything.'

'The schoolmaster is writing out another letter about Ivan,' said a second woman. 'It is to the Tsar* himself this time ; and everything is in it—all about the cart-pin and the garden—so that half of our house will be theirs soon.'

Ivan heard what they were saying, and his heart grew cold again. He gave up the idea of making peace with Gabriel.

On a farm there is always plenty for the master to do. Ivan did not stop to talk to the women, but went out to the shed. By the time he had put everything in order the sun had set and the young fellows had returned from the field. They had been ploughing the field for the winter crops, with two horses. Ivan met them, asked them questions about their work, helped to put everything in its place and put a torn horse-collar out to be mended. He was going to

take some fence-posts to a shed, but it was getting so dark that he decided to leave them where they were till next day. Then he gave the cattle their food, opened the gate, let out the horses which his son, Taras, was to take into the field for the night, and again closed the gate. 'Now,' he thought, 'I'll have my supper and go to bed.' He took the horse-collar and went into the house. By this time he had forgotten about Gabriel and about what his old father had been saying to him. But just as he took hold of the door-handle to go indoors he heard his neighbour on the other side of the fence saying in a rough voice, 'What is the good of him? He's only fit to be killed!' When he heard these words Ivan once again began to hate his neighbour. He stood listening while Gabriel shouted, and, when he was quiet, Ivan went into the house.

There was a light inside. His daughter-in-law sat making a coat, his wife was getting supper ready, his eldest son was making strips for bark shoes, his second son sat near the table with a book, and Taras was getting ready to go out to put the horses in the field for the night. Everything in the house would have been happy and bright but for the worry of a bad neighbour.

Ivan entered angrily, drove the cat off a chair and shouted at the women because they had left a pail in his way. He felt very unhappy as he began to mend the horse-collar. He still seemed to hear Gabriel shouting over the fence, 'He's only fit to be killed!'

His wife gave Taras his supper, and when he had eaten it Taras put on an old sheepskin and another coat, fastened his belt, took some bread with him

and went out to the horses. Ivan got up and went out with his son. It had grown quite dark outside, clouds had gathered and the wind had risen. Ivan helped his son to get on his horse and stood listening while Taras rode down through the village and was there joined by other boys with their horses. Ivan waited until he could hear them no longer. As he stood there by the gate he could not forget Gabriel's words, 'Something of his may burn worse than that.'

'He is mad,' thought Ivan. 'Everything is dry and there is a strong wind blowing. He will crawl round at the back of the house somewhere, start a fire and run away. He will escape and laugh at me! But if I could catch him in the act it would be a different story.' The thought was fixed so firmly in his mind that he did not return to the house, but went out into the street and round the corner. 'I'll just walk round the buildings,' Ivan said to himself. 'Who can tell what harm Gabriel is planning?'

Walking quietly, Ivan passed out of the gate. As soon as he reached the corner, he looked along the fence and thought he saw something moving suddenly at the opposite corner, as if someone had come out and then disappeared. Ivan stopped and stood quietly listening and looking. Everything was quiet but for the sound of the wind in the trees.

At first all seemed quite black, but when Ivan's eyes had grown used to the darkness he could see the far corner, and a plough that lay there, and the lower part of the straw* roof showing against the sky. He looked for a while, but saw no one.

‘ I suppose it was a mistake,’ thought Ivan, ‘ but still I will go round,’ and he went quietly along by the shed. He stepped so softly in his bark shoes that he did not hear his own footsteps. As he reached the far corner he saw a bright flame spring up for a moment near the plough and then disappear. Ivan’s heart almost stopped beating, and suddenly there was another and brighter flame in the same place. He saw clearly a man with a cap on his head, bending down with his back towards him, lighting a bunch of straw he held in his hand. Ivan’s heart was beating fast as he walked quickly towards the flame. ‘ Ah,’ he thought, ‘ now he won’t escape. I’ll catch him in the act ! ’

Ivan was still some distance away when suddenly he saw an even brighter light, not in the same place as before. The straw in the roof was on fire, and Gabriel could be clearly seen standing beneath it.

Ivan rushed at lame Gabriel with the speed of a great hunting bird coming down upon a tiny song-bird. ‘ Now I’ll have him ; he shan’t escape me ! ’ thought Ivan. But Gabriel heard his steps, and in spite of his lame leg he rushed past the shed like a hunted fox. ‘

‘ You shan’t escape ! ’ shouted Ivan, running after him.

Ivan managed to get hold of the skirt of Gabriel’s coat, but as Gabriel pulled away it was torn right off, and Ivan fell down. He got up again and ran on, shouting, ‘ Help ! Stop him ! Robbers ! Fire ! ’ But meanwhile Gabriel had reached his own gate. There Ivan was about to catch hold of Gabriel when something struck Ivan a heavy blow as if a stone had

hit him between the eyes. Gabriel had picked up a thick stick and struck out with all his strength.

Ivan was knocked down. Lights flashed before his eyes and then all grew dark. When he came to his senses Gabriel was no longer there ; it was as light as day, and from the side where his home was there was a noise like an engine at work. Ivan turned round and saw that both his back sheds were on fire, and flames and smoke and bits of straw mixed with the smoke were being driven towards his house.

‘What is this, friends?’ cried Ivan, lifting his arms and beating his body. ‘Why, I needed only to pull the fire out from the roof and beat it out! What is this, friends?’ he kept on saying. He wanted to shout, but he had not enough breath—his voice was gone. He wanted to run, but his legs would not obey him and got in each other’s way. He moved slowly and almost fell. He stood still until his breath came back, and then went on. Before he had got round the back shed to reach the fire, the side shed was also in flames, and the corner of the house and the gate were on fire as well. The flames were springing out of the house, and it was impossible to get into the yard. A large crowd had gathered, but nothing could be done. The neighbours were carrying their goods out of their own houses, and driving the cattle out of their own sheds. After Ivan’s house, Gabriel’s also caught fire, then, as the wind rose, the flames jumped across to the other side of the street and in the end half the village was burnt down.

At Ivan's house they just managed to save his old father ; and the family escaped in their night clothes. Everything else, except the horses that had been driven out to the fields for the night, was lost. All the cattle, the chickens, the carts and ploughs, the women's boxes of clothes, and the grain—all were burnt up !

At Gabriel's, the cattle were driven out, and a few things were saved from the house.

The fire burnt all night. Ivan stood in front of his burning home and kept saying, 'What is this? Friends! One man needed only to pull the fire from the roof and beat it out!' But when the roof fell in, Ivan rushed into the burning place to get a half-burned chair. The women saw him and called to him to come back ; but he pulled out the chair, and was going in again for another when his foot slipped and he fell among the flames. Then his son went in after him and pulled him out. Ivan had burnt his beard, his hair, and his clothes. His hands too were black from the fire, but he felt nothing. 'His sorrow has driven him mad,' said the people. The fire was burning itself out now, but Ivan stood there saying again and again, 'Friends! What is this? One man needed only to pull the fire out!'

In the morning the village Elder's son came for Ivan.

'Ivan, your father is dying ! He has sent for you to say good-bye.'

Ivan had forgotten about his father and did not understand what was said to him.

'What father?' he said. 'Who has he sent for?'

‘He sent for you, to say good-bye ; he is dying in our house. Come along, Ivan,’ said the Elder’s son, pulling his arm, and Ivan followed him.

When he was being carried out of the house some flaming straw had fallen on the old man and burnt him, and he had been taken to the village Elder’s house in the farther part of the village, which the fire did not reach.

When Ivan reached his father there was only the Elder’s wife in the house, and some little children on the top of the stove. All the rest were still at the fire. The old man, who was lying on a bed, holding a candle in his hand, kept turning his eyes towards the door. When his son entered, Ivan’s father moved a little. The old woman went up to him and told him that his son had come. He asked Ivan to come nearer, and Ivan went up to the bedside.

‘What did I tell you, Ivan?’ began the old man. ‘Who has burnt down the village?’

‘It was Gabriel, Father!’ Ivan answered. ‘I caught him doing it. I saw him push a burning bunch of straw into the roof. I might have pulled away the burning straw and beaten it out, and then nothing would have happened.’

‘Ivan,’ said the old man, ‘I am dying, and you in your turn will have to face death. Whose is the blame?’

Ivan looked at his father in silence. He was unable to speak.

‘Now, before God, say who did wrong. What did I tell you?’

Suddenly Ivan came to his senses and understood it all. He said in a shaking voice, 'I did wrong, Father !' And he fell on his knees before his father, saying, 'Forgive me, Father ; I have done wrong to you and to God.'

The old man changed the candle from his right hand to his left. He tried to lift his right hand to his head to make the sign of the cross, but he could not do it and stopped.

'Praise the Lord ! Praise the Lord !' said he, and again he turned his eyes towards his son.

'Ivan, I say, Ivan !'

'What, Father ?'

'What must you do now ?'

Ivan was crying.

'I don't know how we shall live now, Father !' he said.

The old man closed his eyes and lay still to gather strength to speak and, opening his eyes again, said, 'You will manage. If you obey God's will, you will manage !' He stopped, then smiled and said, 'Remember, Ivan ! Don't say who started the fire. Hide another man's wrongdoing and God will forgive you twice.' Then the old man took the candle in both hands, breathed deeply, stretched out his limbs and died.

Ivan did not say anything against Gabriel, and no one else knew what had caused the fire.

Ivan's anger against Gabriel passed away, and Gabriel wondered why Ivan did not tell anybody. At first Gabriel felt afraid, but after a time he got

used to it. The men stopped quarrelling, and then their families also stopped. While new houses were being built both families shared one house ; and when the village was built again, instead of moving farther away from each other, Ivan and Gabriel built next to each other and remained neighbours as before.

They lived as good neighbours should. Ivan remembered his old father's command to obey God's law, to put out a fire while it is still a tiny spark. If anyone does him wrong, he now tries not to do that man wrong in return but rather to put matters right again ; and if anyone swears at him, instead of giving worse in return, he tries to teach the other not to use evil words, and so he teaches the women and children of his family.

And Ivan is now happy again and lives better than he did before.



Glossary

- acre*, measure of land area, equal to 4,840 square yards.
- angel*, (in Christian belief) messenger from God.
- bark*, outer covering or skin of trees.
- Bashkirs*, members of wandering tribes (mixed Mongols and Turks) living in central and western Asia.
- beard*, hair that grows on the lower part of the face.
- beer*, kind of strong drink.
- cards*, (*here*) playing-cards, used for playing games for money.
- cheat*, use dishonest ways of gaining an advantage.
- cough* (vb.), force air noisily through the throat in order to clear it.
- crush*, (*here*) hurt or break by pressing.
- dealer*, person who buys goods and land, and sells or rents them to make money.
- denarii*, plural form of *denarius*, an old Roman coin made of silver and worth about eightpence.
- Devil*, the spirit of evil ; the Being that represents all evil things in the world ; the Enemy of mankind.
- drink* (vb.), (*here*) take strong drink ; (n.) (*here*) strong drink.
- drunkard*, person who often takes too much strong drink.
- Easter*, the day kept in memory of the rising of Christ from the dead.
- Elder*, (*here*) one of the officials of the District Court.
- fine* (n.), sum of money paid, by order of a judge, etc., as a punishment.
- flax*, plant from which threads are made for fine cloth.

fox, wild animal like a large dog with reddish hair and a thick tail, thought to be very clever.

host, man who entertains guests.

imp, child of the Devil ; little devil.

interpreter, person who translates conversations or speeches for people speaking different languages.

Justice of the Peace, judge for a small district.

kopek, one hundredth part of a *rouble*.

kumiss, strong drink made by the Tartars from mare's milk.

lame, unable to walk properly because of a bad foot or leg.

law-suit, case heard in a law-court.

mare, female horse.

neighbour, person who lives in the house next to one's own.

novel, long story making a complete book.

pail, round, open-topped container with a flat bottom and a handle, used for carrying water, milk, etc.

peasant, country person living and working on the land, but not owning or using much land.

pity (vb.), feel regret or sorrow for the pain, trouble or loss suffered by another.

pool, small area of water that has collected in a hole in the ground.

ready money, money which a man has ready to pay for goods, land, etc., at the time when he buys them.

rouble, silver coin. The value of a rouble, at the time of this story, was about two shillings.

shed, small wooden building used for keeping animals in or for storing things.

shrine, (*here*) small building or shelter for a religious painting.

Siberia, the eastern part of Russia, where prisoners were sometimes sent for punishment.

sleeve, part of coat, etc., which covers the arm.

soup, liquid food made by boiling meat, bones or vegetables in water.

spark, very small bit of burning matter sent out from a fire.
stove, shut-in fire for heating and cooking ; (in Russia) a large brick-built closed fireplace with a flat top on which people sleep.

straw, dried stalks of such grains as wheat and rice, used as bedding for animals and for making roofs.

swear (past tense *swore*), (*here*) use bad language when angry.

talent, silver coin which at the time of Christ was worth about £200.

tent, shelter made of strong cloth (called *canvas*).

thread, long, thin piece of cotton, wool or silk used for sewing, etc.

Tsar, name used for the Emperors of Russia.

twin, one of two children born at the same time from the same mother.

uneasy, worried.

vodka, very strong Russian drink.

wax, soft, yellow substance made by bees for building ; used by shoemakers to make thread strong.

wedding, marriage.

wolf, wild animal like a large grey dog. Wolves go about together and attack sheep and cattle.

yard, (*here*) small area of land near or round a building, usually with a wall or fence round it.

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